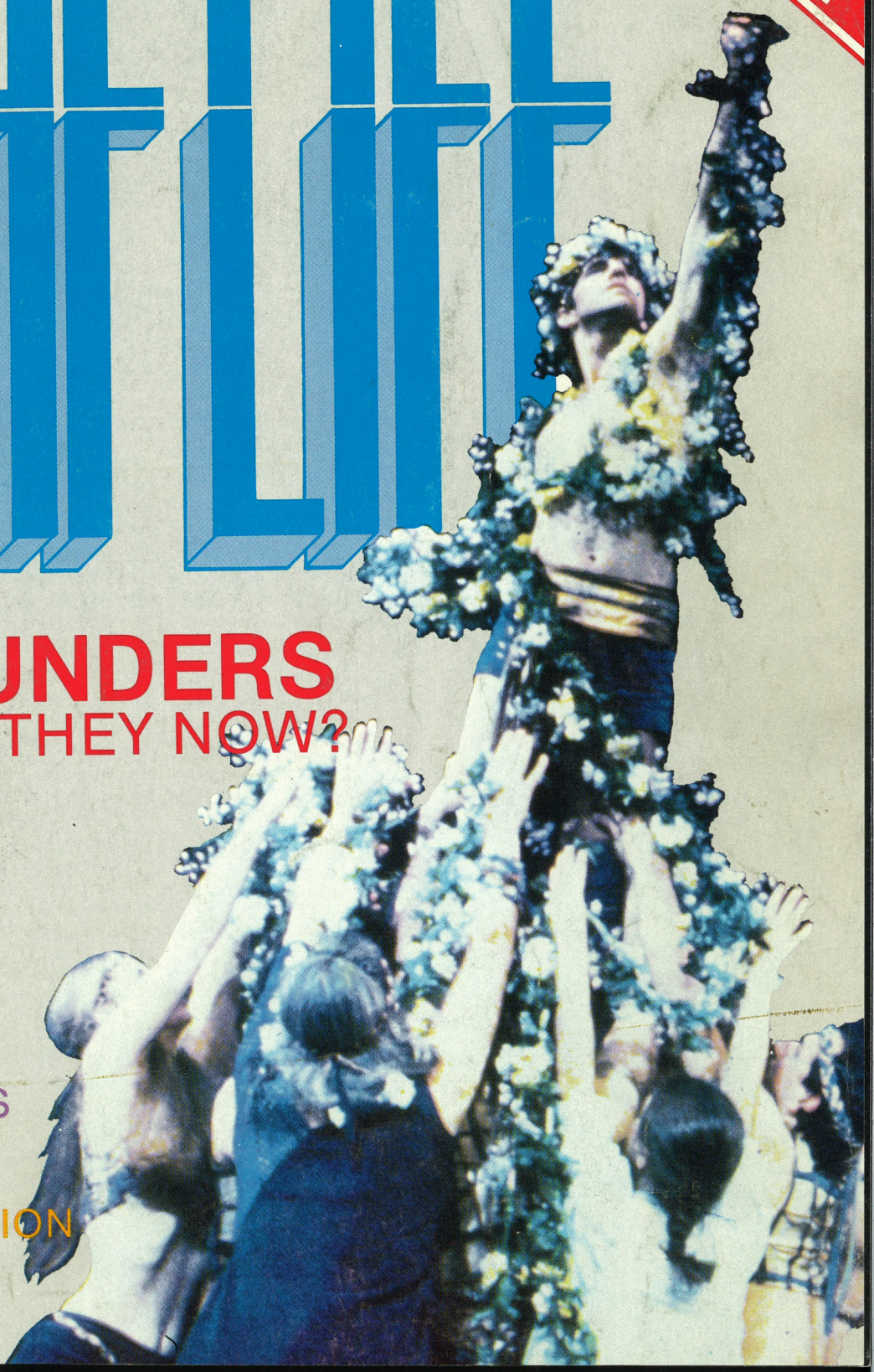
TRIAL ISSUE 1987 $2.50

TRIAL ISSUE

DEAF LIFE

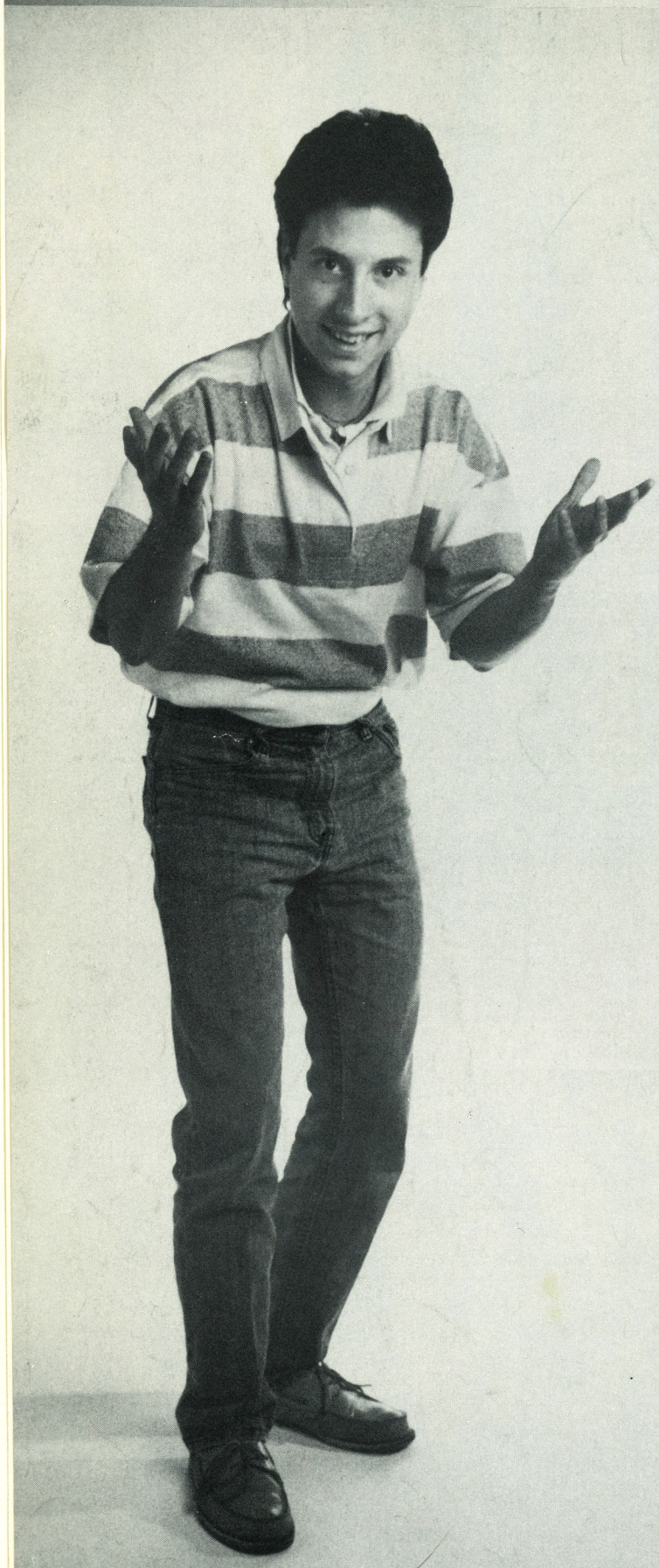


NTD FOUNDERS
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

KEVIN NOLAN:
A POLITICAL SUCCESS STORY

DEBBIE RENNIE:
WOMAN OF A THOUSAND FACES

DOES ASL HAVE A PLACE IN EDUCATION FOR THE DEAF?



INTRO

HELLO

It gives me great pleasure to know that you are holding a copy of **DEAF LIFE**, which is the culmination of one of my most cherished dreams: to produce a magazine about deaf Americans which would benefit all its readers, both deaf and hearing. It is my hope that DEAF LIFE will bring understanding to parents, educators, advocates, and friends of deaf people by showing them how we, the deaf Americans, view life around us, how we think, how we feel, and what we are doing. It is also my hope that this magazine will entertain as well as inform its deaf readership.

It is my intention that **DEAF LIFE** express our authentic viewpoints and thus faithfully represent life in Deaf communities all over the country. We will cover topics from profiles of newsmakers to politics to the arts and illuminate the deaf experience, the real deaf experience in America.

However, I wish to stress that we are not here to compete against such distinguished publications as *NAD Broadcaster, Deaf American,* and *Silent News.* **DEAF LIFE** is not meant to supplant them but to complement them. It is different from other deaf/hearing-impaired publications in that we emphasize a strong photojournalism approach while focusing on human interest stories and issues of concern to the deaf/hearing-impaired communities. I strongly believe that these pre-existing publications are very useful to all of us and hope that **DEAF LIFE** may be added to this prestigious list.

We need to build bridges between our deaf and hearing communities. It's time to share our views on issues like education, taxes, media representation--and many, many others. It's time to share our **"DEAF LIFE"** with those who want to understand us. Now you can sit back, relax, and enjoy this one-of-a-kind magazine!

Matthew S. Moore
Publisher

DUCING

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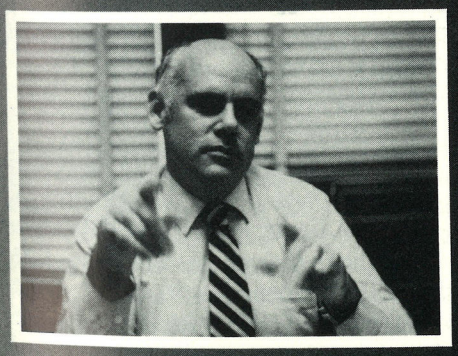

Kevin Nolan

Kevin Nolan carved a place in history by becoming the first deaf American to be elected to a public office. Now a city council member, he tells us in an interview what it took to get there. 9

In this issue we review for your pleasure the films **Children of a Lesser God** and **Star Trek IV**, and new books **Islay**, a novel about a special deaf community, and **Action 7**, a unique publication featuring the visual poetry of Peter Cook, Patrick Graybill and Debbie Rennie. 4

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PUBLISHER: MATTHEW S. MOORE; **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:** JULIE A. BONTA; **COPY EDITORS:** LINDA LEVITAN, DAVID SELL; **TECHNICAL DIRECTOR:** CHARLES F. BANCROFT; **TECHNICAL ASSISTANT:** RAMONA M. GALINDEZ; **CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS:** ELIZABETH AULT, PETER COOK, MATTHEW S. MOORE, MARIE NGUYEN; **CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:** C. TANE AKAMATSU, JULIE A. BONTA, LINDA LEVITAN, MATTHEW S. MOORE, WILMA R. SANTIAGO; **CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPERS:** JENNIFER BAKER, ED DIPPMAN, NANCY McCORMICK, KAREN WASHBURN; **TYPIST:** DAVID D. LONG; **SECRETARY TO THE PUBLISHER:** LILLIAN M. GARCIA.

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MOVIE REVIEWS

BY MATTHEW S. MOORE

CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD

Based on the Tony Award-winning "Best Play of 1979-80," this film version features William Hurt as James Leeds, an unorthodox speech therapist newly assigned to a deaf school who becomes involved in a complicated affair with a very stubborn and angry young woman, Sarah Norman, played by Marlee Matlin, a 21-year-old deaf Chicagoan.

Unfortunately, despite powerful performances by Matlin and Hurt, this film has managed to lose the essence (and strength) of the original Mark Medoff play. Important subsidiary characters (like Orin Dennis) are diminished while details of the couple's affair are emphasized--a radical shift from the focus of the play.

Although it is the first nationally-distributed film to feature an extensive cast of Deaf performers, Children is clearly aimed at a Hearing audience. This is disappointing enough, but the availability of a few subtitled prints in certain communities has been somewhat consoling. We can only hope that this film, a commercial success, will open the doors even further for Deaf actors and actresses.

STAR TREK IV : THE VOYAGE HOME

The fourth Star Trek film (and the second to be directed by Leonard Nimoy) is a lighthearted tale about a contemporary marine biologist, Dr. Gillian Taylor (Catherine Hicks) who joins the crew of the late Starship Enterprise as they undertake a mission into the Earth's past in an effort to preserve its future.

Even without the benefit of subtitles (we couldn't find any available screenings), Star Trek IV was nonetheless easy to follow with its simple storyline about a 23rd-century alien probe which, unable to find any humpback whales left to communicate with, is destroying the earth because we foolish humanoids have hunted the most intelligent mammal on earth to extinction. The crew of the Enterprise goes back to the 20th century (December 1986, to be exact) to capture two humpbacks and bring them back to the 23rd century to prevent any further destruction of Earth by the probe. All very clear, but we should wait until this feature is released with closed-captioning to get its full flavor. There's a lot of whimsy and humor here, and a lot of fun, and it'd be a shame to miss any of it.

RATINGS:

FORGET IT *SO-SO* *OK* *GOOD* *EXCELLENT*

Letter FromThe Editor. . .

You hold in your hands a copy of a unique experiment -- **DEAF LIFE**. This magazine represents many long hours of hard work by a talented staff of dedicated people -- 99% of whom happen to be deaf/hearing-impaired. All of us were completely new to the world of magazine publishing. We have struggled, laughed, cried, made mistakes, and accomplished much together. On behalf of publisher Matthew S. Moore and myself, I'd like to thank the staff publicly for giving so much of their time and energy to this project -- all on a voluntary basis.

DEAF LIFE was created in response to a need for better visibility and representation of deaf/hearing-impaired people in the larger world. This project is the first major attempt to create an independent magazine (one not beholden to any organization) that would include a diversity of views from subgroups within the larger deaf/hearing-impaired community. Previously, other publications have featured articles about the deaf only on a special basis, or have tended to be professional journals intended for those who work with the deaf. There is currently nothing else on the national market that a varied majority of deaf/hearing-impaired people will find entertaining, representative, and sensitive to their level of visual sophistication. **DEAF LIFE** exists to fill that need.

It is our deepest hope and desire to provide a forum where hearing and deaf/hearing-impaired alike can share a voice in common understanding, with a healthy respect for the individuality and beauty of each culture. Not an easy task, but a challenge we feel up to.

Because this is a trial issue, we are asking all of you to please send us your responses, comments, and suggestions for improvement. This project cannot continue without your support. If you wish to see **DEAF LIFE** become a regular part of American history, let us know. If we receive enough positive responses, we will begin publishing **DEAF LIFE** on a regular basis in 1988.

Won't you join us in this exciting venture?

Julie Bonta

Julie A. Bonta
Editor-in-Chief

BOOK REVIEWS *By Linda Levitan*

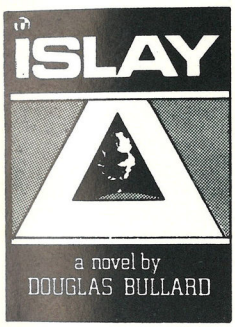
FREEZE-DRIED FIRE

Action Number 7, Edited by Donna Kachites and Jim Cohn (Rochester: 21st Sensual Press, 1986).

The best way to experience ASL "Visual Poetry" is by seeing it live. There is no substitute for this, and it's one of the advantages of being in Rochester, New York, whose adventurous Deaf culture has spawned a rich outburst of this relatively new and most colorful genre, which combines elements of Sign recitative, Sign mime, and pantomime. More intimate than theatre, visual poetry is a dynamic, even political, interaction between the poet and audience. By turns dramatic, political, satiric, vulgar, lyrical, whimsical and plain funny, readings of visual poetry have become popular (and very lively) events. Three outstanding Deaf poets, Peter Cook, Debbie A. Rennie, and Patrick Graybill, are represented in Action Number 7. Well known in Rochester, they deserve more exposure elsewhere.

Having had the pleasure of seeing these three artists perform their work in public, some of which I recognized in the magazine, and having experienced that crackling excitement firsthand, I have to admit that a printed compendium is a poor substitute for the actual flesh-and-blood encounter. Visual poetry is not only a visual mode, but a kinetic one. While the impact of visual poetry is necessarily diminished by translation into printed English texts, there is a raw, "primitive" power inherent in these verses that makes reading them worthwhile. Taken as "straight English" poetry, it is good strong stuff.

Especially fascinating are the interviews with Cook, Rennie, and Graybill which follow each poet's work, in which they discuss the conceptual relationship of poetry to ASL, the potential for an indigenous Deaf poetry, ASL and the Deaf audience, Deaf culture and politics. Asked "Do you think ASL poetry could be a source of power for deaf people?" Rennie replies, "I'm sure when deaf people see more and more ASL poetry it will have an effect on them too. It will make them realize it's something they can do too." Action Number 7 reflects a growing awareness of this power and symbolizes the promise of an emergent form of Deaf artistry, one which truly belongs to its people.



THE GEOGRAPHY OF BEFUDDLEMENT

Douglas Bullard, Islay (Silver Spring: T.J. Publishers, 1986).

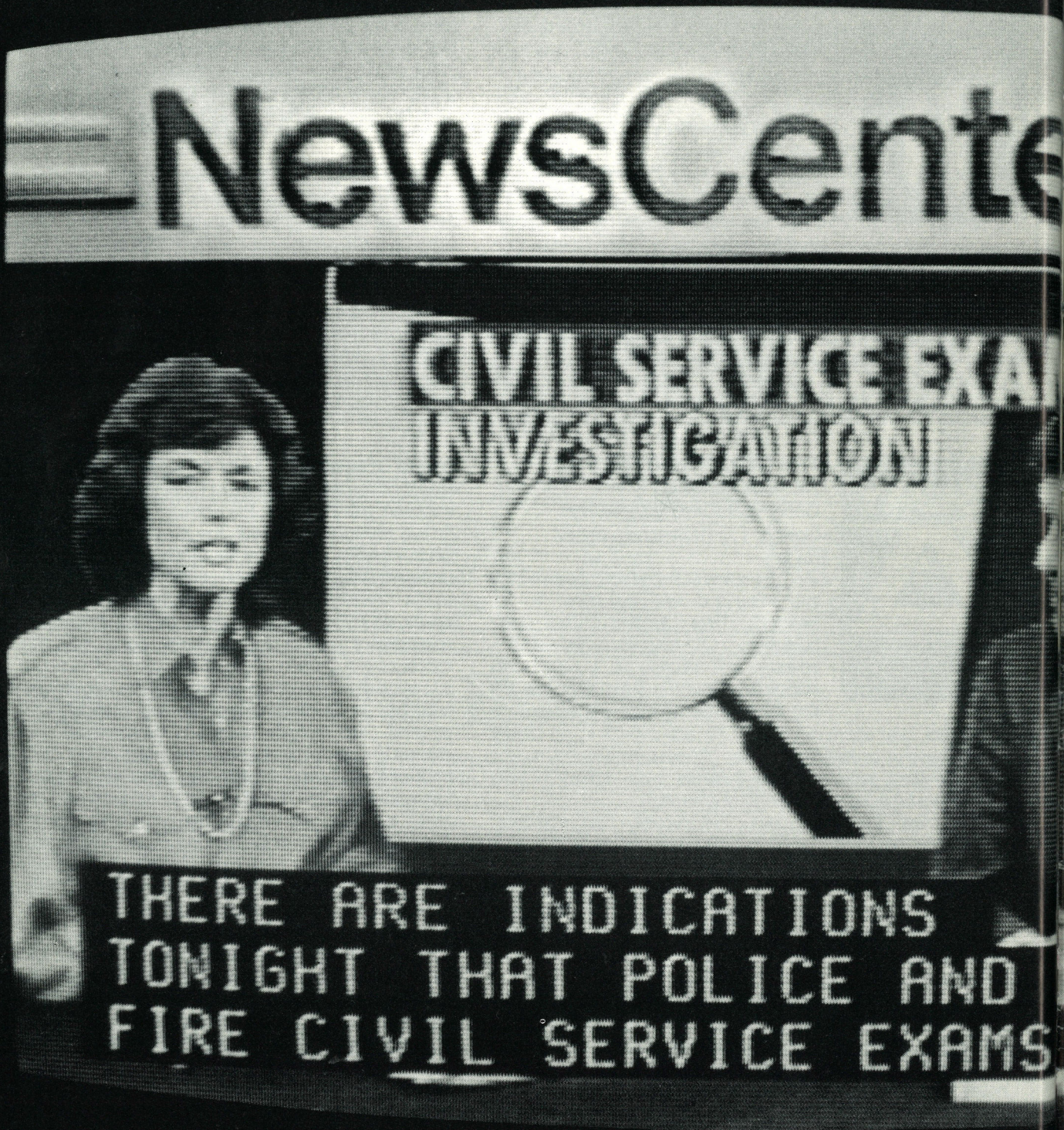
Islay is one of the weirdest books I have ever read, and may well stand as the strangest Deaf fantasy novel ever published. It chronicles the dream, odyssey, and struggle of a government statistician, Lyson C. Sulla, to buy up the tiny island state of Islay and establish a self-sufficient Deaf community there. He also intends to get himself elected Governor of this "new" state. Of course he succeeds, but that is the least interesting aspect of the book. What is more significant are the questions raised (if not answered).

There are three segments, clangorously titled "Strings," "Drums," and "Cymbals," each progressively weaker. The most intriguing part of the book, if only for its unfulfilled promise, is the Prologue, where we see the protagonist in his original surroundings, a "secret den" in his apartment where he spends his Saturdays obsessively puttering around with miniature soldiers and warships on a table top map of Islay. There is a touching reminiscence of Lyson's grandmother, who had presented him with his prized collection of matchbox models, the finest (and the one that inspired his dream) being a knight astride Pegasus, the fabulous winged steed. Unfortunately, the novel goes downhill from there. Shortly after Lyson is forced to "go public" with his obsession, he is off to Islay, in a Lincoln Continental, on a reconnaissance mission. Befriended by wealthy and powerful Hearing natives, he then embarks on a cross-country trip to enlist Deaf constituents, with by-now-predictable results. Returning to Islay, he gets (indirectly) embroiled in conflicts with the nasty incumbent Governor and the fanatically pro-oral government doctor as well as his own suave, sharkish Deaf adversary. By novel's end he is rolling in it.

The trouble is, Islay is a novel that cannot make up its mind whether it wants to be funny or satiric or quasi-realistic or merely flaky; it wavers between one and the other and ends up going each way and none, with the reader, like a closet masochist, caught in the middle. Bullard has taken pains with the geography of his imaginary island, which becomes one of the more convincing presences in the book. Unhappily, the characters who people it are largely reduced to tin and plastic miniatures. Lyson himself exists as a surface concretion of details, an endless dribble of crude physical sensations, and as such possesses a lumpish sort of vitality, but is only convincing as a caricature of a nebbish. He is an alcoholic schlemiel with a roving eye and an oral fixation (the Freudian, not the linguistic kind). We are supposed to believe that he has the intelligence, determination, charisma, and integrity needed to persuade all manner of Deaf citizens to uproot themselves and relocate in his state, and has the necessary attributes--shrewdness, savvy--of a Governor. But he fails to convince us. The discrepancy between nerd and charismat is simply too great, and the story refuses to hang together. Klutzy and convoluted, the style of the book leaves much to be desired. By turns plodding, banal, or simply tacky, the narrative has been assembled with astounding carelessness. The syntax is frequently muddy, adjectives pile up like logjams, and grammatical blunders proliferate. The book becomes an incoherent soup of undeveloped or inconsistent characters, implausible situations, and half-cooked motives. When Lyson suffers a nervous breakdown in the penultimate chapters, the narrative reaches the apex of pure awfulness, but a howling crescendo of nonsense is achieved in the climactic battle, a frenzied, farcical mishmash: Lyson's A-Team Meets the $1.98 Popularity Contest.

Islay affords few lasting pleasures, lacking the most minimal satisfactions of characters, plot, humor, or even thesis. Despite this, it has its dubious charms. The political and cultural issues it raises (and then shoves swiftly under the rug) are valid. It is occasionally, more often unintentionally, amusing. It is, however, definitely not for those who like their fiction intelligible. Islay may not be the Great American Deaf Novel, but it demonstrates that Deaf literature has come of age: we now have our own literary turkeys as well as our winged steeds.

WCVB AND WGBH



LOCAL CAPTIONING

BOSTON:

COURTESY OF WCVB-TV

PIONEERS

In March of 1986, WCVB-TV and WGBH-TV of Boston, Massachusetts, made history by televising three local news programs with real-time closed captioning. Those programs are WCVB's "NewsCenter 5 at Six" and "Chronicle" plus WGBH's "Ten O'Clock News". Even though captioning technology has been available since the early 1970s, this was the first time local television stations decided to caption their news regularly.

Boston viewers have Mr. Philip S. Balboni, Vice President of News at WCVB-TV, to thank for starting the captioned news project. In a December 1985 news release, Mr. Balboni said that the joint WCVB-WGBH captioning project was "one of the most important things I've done in my fourteen years at WCVB". Mr. Balboni also stated in an interview with DEAF LIFE that he was "proud of WCVB's pioneering efforts in this area" and that service to the public was a top priority with WCVB. When asked how the project got started, Mr. Balboni told DEAF LIFE that it was a long process involving getting many people together and finding funding for captioning. The Honeywell Corporation agreed to make $120,000 available for the project with additional funds coming from WCVB-TV and WGBH-TV.

As most of us know, captioning is a real blessing to the deaf/hearing impaired communities. Without it, much of what we learn about the world around us is lost. Yet, most of us don't understand how it works. DEAF LIFE asked Director Mardi Loeterman of Boston's Caption Center to explain what real-time captioning is all about. According to Ms. Loeterman, captioning is neither

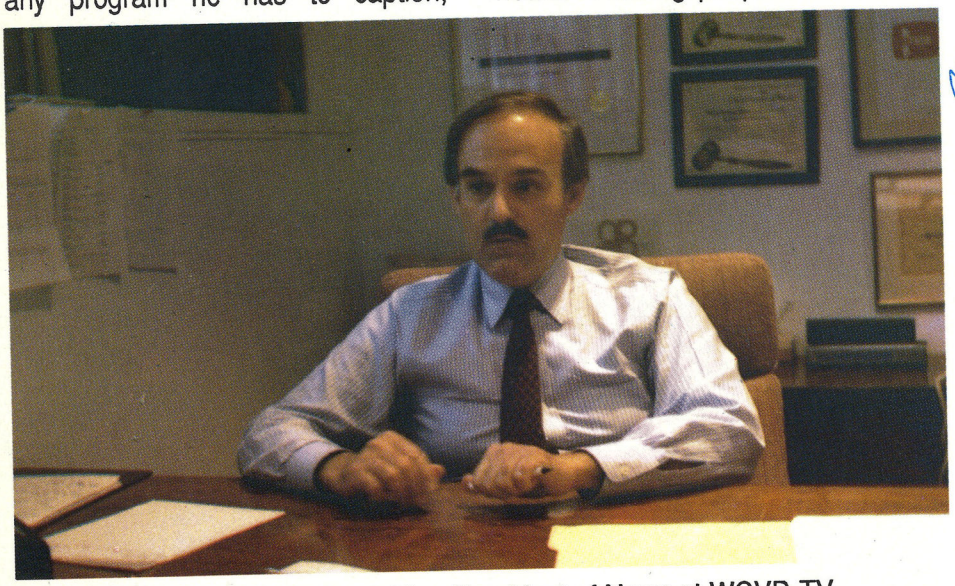
CLOSED-CAPTIONED

COURTESY OF WCVB

a cheap nor easy process. She estimated that 30-40 hours of work had to be done just to caption one hour of any television program. When a program is captioned in real time, this means that there is someone typing captions at the moment the television program is aired -- exactly when we see it. This is done through a complicated connection of person and machine.

The human part of this process is called a stenographer. It is his job to sit with earphones connected to any program he has to caption, ready to type out words into a stenographic machine. The stenographic machine has 22 characters, but it is not a typewriter. It uses a system based on writing speech as it is heard, not as it is spelled in normal English. This is called phonetics. The stenographic machine is connected to a computer that has a very big dictionary in it. When the stenographer hears the words from the TV broadcast, he types them on the stenographic machine in phonetics. The machine then sends the phonetics to the computer and the computer finds the English words in the dictionary and puts them together in captions. Then the computer sends the captions back to the TV station to be broadcast. All of that happens in just a few seconds.

This system is not perfect. Sometimes the captions don't match what the people on the TV are saying exactly. There are at least two good reasons for this. One is that the stenographer must type what he hears. Hearing people do not have perfect speech or perfect hearing, and sometimes the stenographer cannot understand what a person on television is saying, but of course, he cannot call the person up and ask him to repeat what was said. The other reason mistakes can happen is because the computer does not have every word in the English language in its memory bank. If a word the stenographer types is not in the computer, the computer will pick another word that sounds like it and send that word back to be captioned, instead of the right word. Also, many of the television programs use proper names, which have to be put into the computer because the dictionary doesn't have the names. According Ms. Loeterman of the Caption Center, new words are added into the computer every day, so the system is constantly expanding and improving.



Mr. Philip S. Balboni, Vice-President of News at WCVB-TV

It takes courage to be a pioneer. WCVB-TV and WGBH-TV are to be highly praised for not only making the effort to include the deaf and hearing impaired in the larger world, but also for making it a success. Both television stations have employees who are deaf/hearing impaired and Honeywell, the major funder for the captioning, has a long history of service to the handicapped.

In closing, Mr. Balboni offered several suggestions to those of you living in other cities and other states who are interested in seeing your local news captioned. First - write to all of your local stations and ask them to caption their news. Explain why you want the service and thank them for considering your request. Second, buy decoders and use them. The more people who buy decoders, the more advertisers will realize that there is a big need for captioning. Third, contact all of your friends, family, and co-workers. Have them write to local television stations and ask for captioning.

Boston did it - So can you !

DEAF LIFE *Julie A. Bonta*
Ed Dippman - Photo

COURTESY OF WCVB

Kevin Nolan:

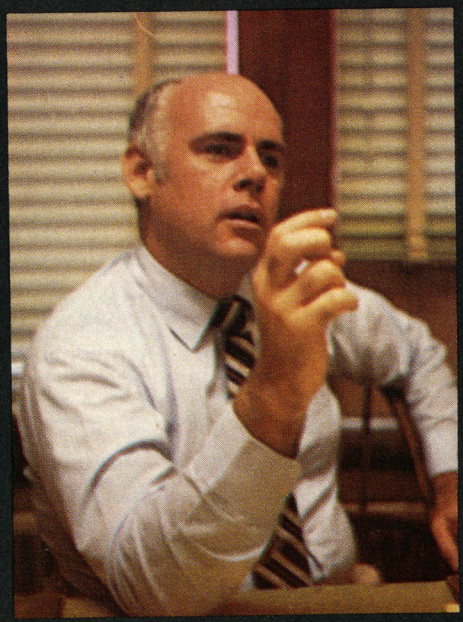
a political success story

Until November 5th of 1985, the involvement of deaf people in politics was almost non-existent. On that day Kevin Nolan of Northampton, Massachusetts, was elected to the Northampton City Council and therefore became the first deaf-born person to be elected into public office in the United States. To the people who know him it comes as no surprise that Kevin Nolan made the attempt to get elected and succeeded. He is famous for telling his Clarke School students to "try, and try again - even if you don't succeed, you will have done the best you can". This time, Kevin Nolan simply took his own advice.

DEAF LIFE decided to interview Mr. Nolan in Northampton, where he is a guidance counselor at the Clarke School for the Deaf. We met with him in his office there and spent two hours talking with him.

DEAF LIFE: Mr. Nolan, your success in being elected on the City Council here in Northampton is a big victory for you, isn't it ?

KEVIN: I'm still amazed! (laughing) I ran against a man who had been on the City Council for twenty years and had a good reputation. The odds of winning the election weren't that good, but I decided to run anyway because I knew that if I didn't try, I would always regret not making the effort.

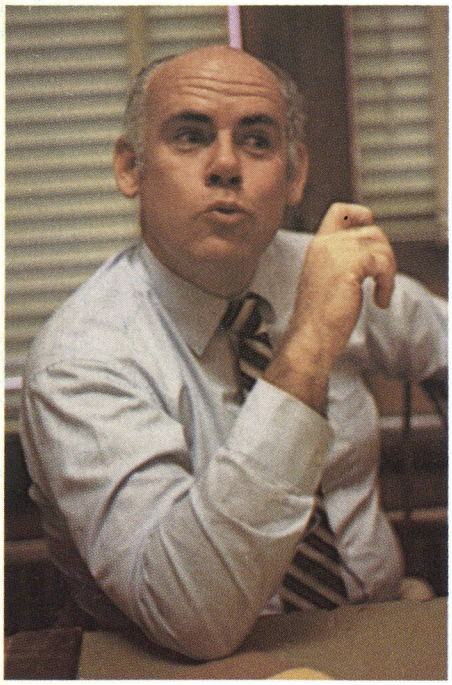


DEAF LIFE: Can you tell us how you got started in politics?

KEVIN: Yes, I have been interested in politics since the 1960s when I was at Clarke School. J.F.K. (John Fitzgerald Kennedy) inspired me because he was a young president and someone who believed in people. I felt that I could understand and follow him better than any other political person at the time. For the next twenty years I kept up with what was happening in politics and participated primarily by voting.

DEAF LIFE: What made you decide to run for the Northampton City Council? Why now?

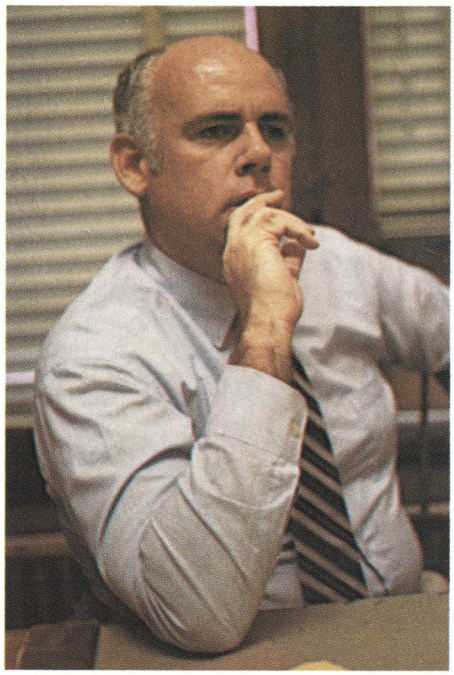
KEVIN: I felt that it was time for a change. That was my campaign slogan: "Time for a change". My opponent had done a good job for twenty years, but I felt that the



Council needed a new person, a new perspective. There might be different and better ways to solve problems in the city if I got elected. I felt it was the right time to run last year because I had the support of my family and other people who believed in my ability to do the job. Also, I believe in my own abilities and in the abilities of others to do anything they want to do, if they will only give it a try.

DEAF LIFE: Would you tell us a little about what you had to do to run for the City Council office?

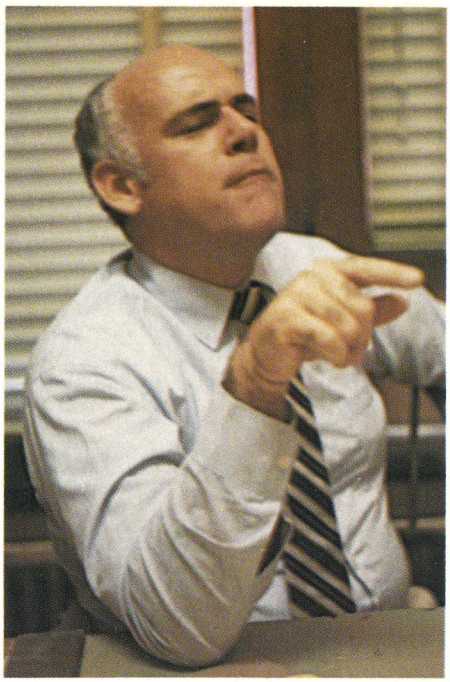
KEVIN: Well, let me think. I had to get a nomination form from the City Hall and then get at least 100 signatures from people in my ward so that I had enough support to run. I also needed to get support politically from people who already were involved in government, and a cam-



paign committee was set up for me to help raise funding. I announced my candidacy right here at Clarke School, in the same classroom where I started my education. It was a real pleasure to be able to do that.

DEAF LIFE: That sounds like alot of work!

KEVIN: (laughing) Yes, it is. I went out and knocked on 2500 doors personally because I wanted people to know who they were dealing with. I didn't take an interpreter because I wanted people to see that I was willing to be direct with them. I wanted to show people that my deafness wouldn't have to be an obstacle, or that I was afraid to meet people. It must have worked because many of the people I talked to really appreciated having someone come and spend some time with them personally. I got a lot of feedback from them.



DEAF LIFE: How does your deafness change anything on the City Council, if it does?

KEVIN: Well, people have learned to slow down most of the time and speak one at a time, except when there are arguments! (laughing) I have an interpreter when I go to meetings and the Council Members seem to have gotten used to the interpreters. Other than that, I participate just a fully as any other Councilman. I am currently on the Rule, Fire, and Industry committee because we discuss procedures and rules for things like elections and City ordinances.

DEAF LIFE: Mr. Nolan, DEAF LIFE thanks you for your generosity and wishes you the best in the future. Is there anything you'd especially like to say to our readers?

KEVIN: Thank you. Let me think..... Just to be willing to take risks and do your best at whatever you like to do. There is nothing anyone, including the deaf, cannot do, if they are willing to try. If you try and fail, it's still good because you will have done your best.

DEAF LIFE *Julie A. Bonta*
Ed Dippman - Photo

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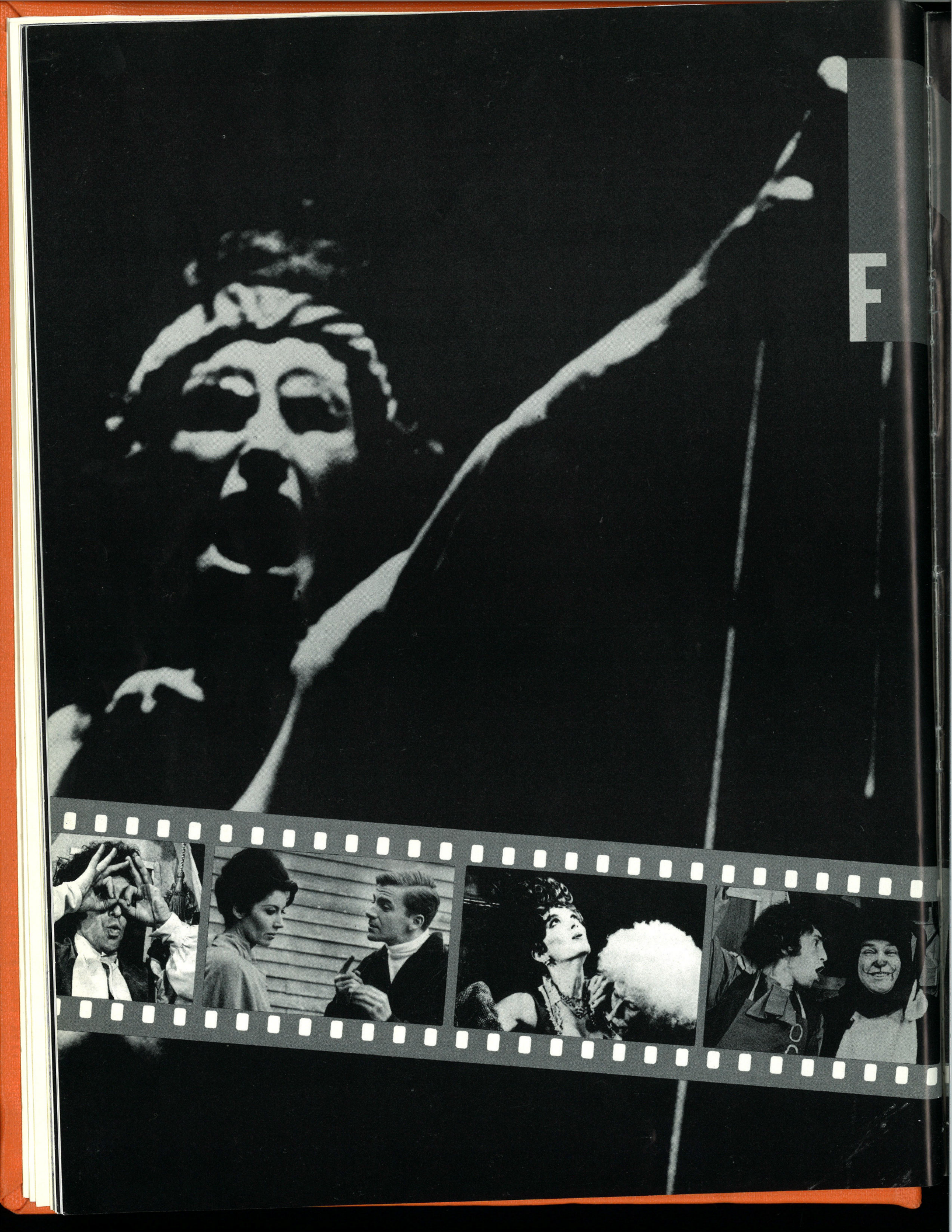


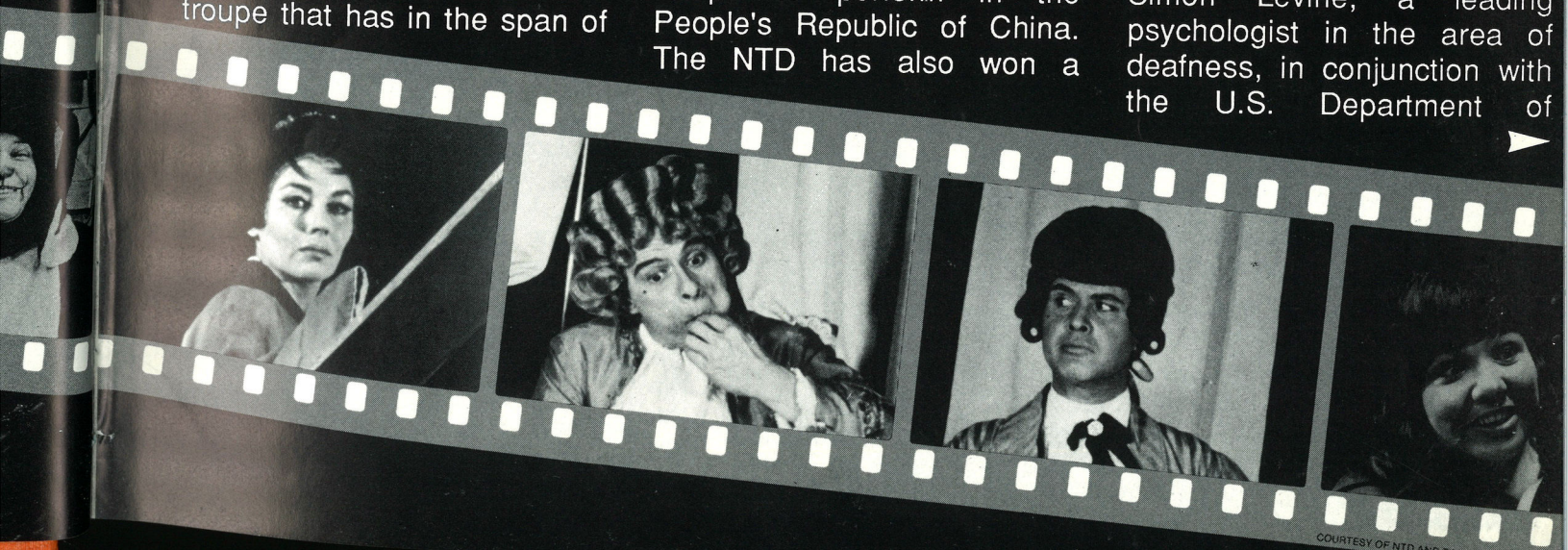
NTD FOUNDERS

where are they now?

In the fall of 1967, an innovative theatre company began its first tour of the United States with impressive productions of Saroyan's The Man With His Heart in the Highlands; Tsuruya Namboku's The Tale of Kasane; Tyger! Tyger! and other Burnings, collected poems; and Gianni Schicci, an adaptation of the opera by Giacomo Puccini. Perhaps more remarkable was the fact that this troupe of talented professionals was composed mostly of deaf persons.

We are speaking, of course, of the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD), a theatrical troupe that has in the span of twenty years become a world-renowned touring company. This theatre of Sign has garnered praise from such diverse sources as The New York Times, Variety, Show Business, The National Observer, and the Cincinnati Enquirer, which named the troupe "A National Treasure". The NTD also has the distinction of being the only professional American touring company to have performed in all 50 states, and has performed abroad more than any other American troupe. This past May, the NTD became the first Western troupe to perform in the People's Republic of China. The NTD has also won a Tony, made TV specials for CBS and PBS, performed at the Lincoln Theatre and the Kennedy Center, and given over 3000 performances in 1500 schools and theatres.

Since its beginning in 1967, the NTD has become the launching pad for many deaf theatre professionals. The NTD owes much to the persistence of its founder and Artistic Director, David Hays, a true Renaissance man with an extensive list of accomplishments. He was part of a trio (the others being Anne Bancroft and Arthur Penn) who were asked by Edna Simon Levine, a leading psychologist in the area of deafness, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of



COURTESY OF NTD AND TIM SCANLON

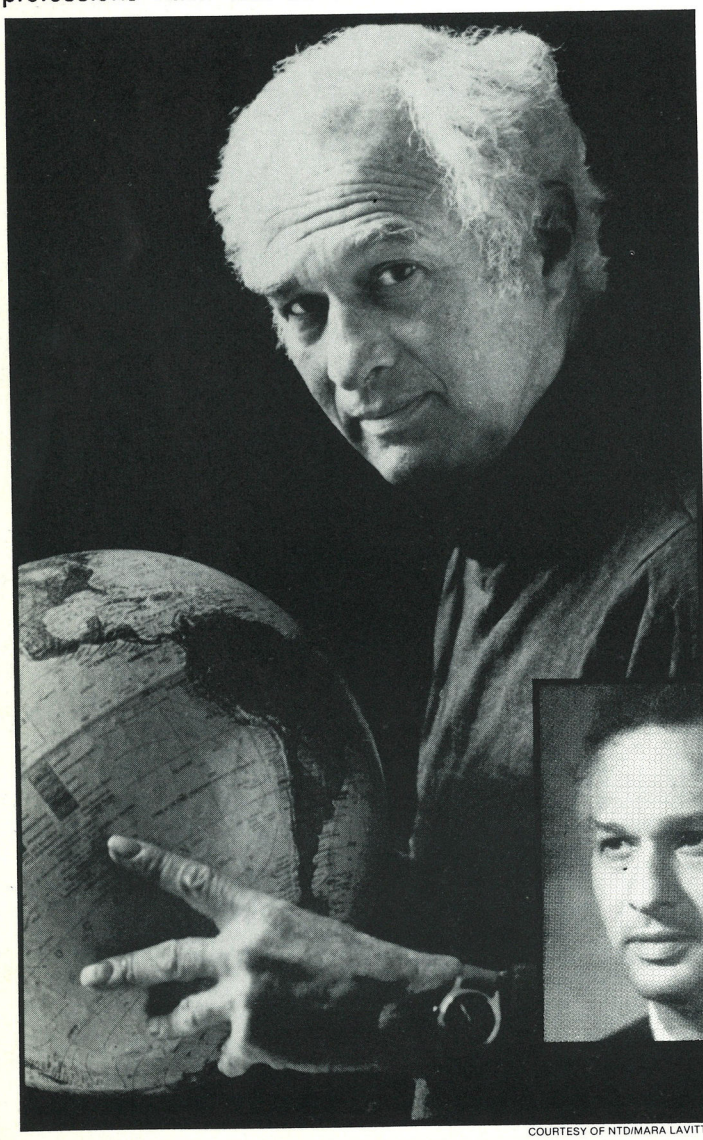
...HERE THEY ARE ! ! !

Health, Education, and Welfare, to develop a Broadway production featuring deaf actors. The production never materialized, but David Hays continued to believe in the possibilities of deaf involvement in theatre. As a result, he created a proposal for a theatre of the deaf which was approved and funded by HEW. Thus the National Theatre of the Deaf was born.

The NTD has come a long way since its early days. To celebrate NTD's remarkable achievements, DEAF LIFE has followed up on the activities of the founding members. Many are still actively involved in the theatre, carrying on a tradition of artistic excellence. Even those members who have gone on to other professions have told us that their days with NTD were an incomparable foundation for their personal and professional development.

Because of the daring of a few dedicated individuals, The National Theatre of the Deaf has done more to generate positive publicity about deaf/hearing-impaired communities than most other institutions. It has been an international consciousness-raiser and provided educational, political, and social impetus for badly needed changes in attitude towards and opportunities for the deaf. It remains an American institution dedicated to celebrating the artistic achievements of the deaf. It is a tradition that DEAF LIFE is proud to salute and celebrate, especially on the momentous occasion of the National Theatre of the Deaf's 20th anniversary.

COURTESY OF NTD/MELANIE SUE BAROCAS

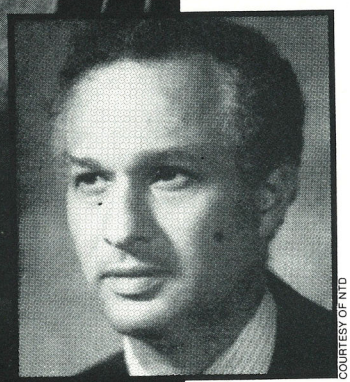


COURTESY OF NTD/MARA LAVITT

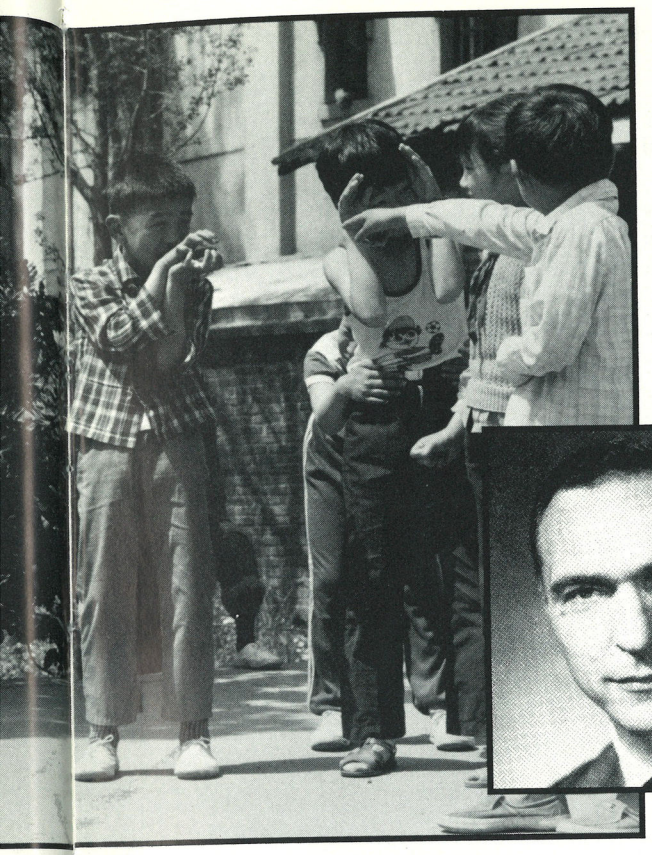
DAVID HAYS

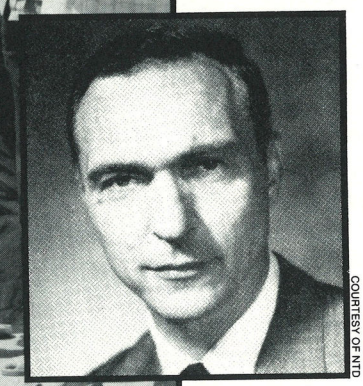
David Hays has been the directing force of the NTD since its inception in 1967. He remembers being astounded by the "power and grace of sign language. . . . It was", he said, "sculpture in the air." Hays persevered in the face of prevalent ignorance about the country's deaf population. From the beginning he was insistent that the NTD emphasize artistic development and not be a place where deaf artists just had nice jobs. He predicted that if change was going to occur in the attitudes and understanding of Americans, it would come through the inspiration and power of art.

Hays has a distinguished background -- Harvard and a Fulbright scholarship at London's Old Vic. He is an adjunct professor at Connecticut College and has an honorary doctorate from Gallaudet. He also has served as panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts. Hays has won many awards as a set and lighting designer, including the best set award for The Quare Fellow and The Balcony, the Critics' Poll Award for No Strings, and Tony nominations for The Tenth Man, All The Way Home, and Drat, The Cat!. With over fifty Broadway sets to his credit, he has designed many ballet sets for the New York City Ballet under George Balanchine and was Sarah Caldwell's designer when she began the Boston Opera. He also was technical consultant for the first Grand Kabuki tour of America. An excellent sailor, Hays and his son Daniel have rounded Cape Horn in a Twenty-five foot sailboat.



COURTESY OF NTD





COURTESY OF NTD

ANDREW VASNICK

Andy is an outspoken, articulate man with an intense belief in learning. Appropriately, he has served the NTD as the Director of the Professional Theatre School at the Hazel E. Stark Center in Chester, CT since 1979.

Andy's list of credits include performances in all the NTD productions since 1980, plus a special production of A Christmas Carol as Scrooge. He has consistently served as instructor in all TAIDE programs as well as other special workshops. With his strong attachment to Japanese culture, he has participated in many Japanese Theatre of the Deaf workshops.

Although common misconceptions about the deaf still abound, Andy insists that they have become fewer and fewer in number since the NTD's inception. The implication is clear. He refutes the myth that deaf people are good actors by dint of their "natural" tendency to read and mimic body movement, but the potential for acting is real. "Signing is not acting," he asserts, emphasizing the patent need for professional training in the theatre arts to eliminate mediocrity in presentation.

Even more eloquent is Andy's plea for more emphasis on education in the arts for the deaf. He states: "Our schools are way behind in arts education. We are little exposed to theatre or other art forms because they are not considered essential. It is difficult for the deaf to appreciate theatre without the cultural and literary background hearing people receive as a matter of course." Andy feels strongly that theatre arts is an especially effective method of teaching the deaf because theatre, by its very nature, is a storytelling profession -- and if there's one thing most deaf people love, it's a good story!

PHYLLIS FRELICH

One of the more visible NTD founding members is Phyllis Frelich, who has, of course, remained actively involved in theatre. She joined NTD in 1967, after David Hays spotted her in a Gallaudet Theatre production of Iphigenia in Aulis and invited her to participate in the O'Neill Center's theatre summer school. The rest, as they say, is history. Frelich then achieved fame by winning a Tony Award as best actress in 1980 for her powerful portrayal of Sarah Norman Leeds in the original Broadway production of Children of a Lesser God -- a part that was created just for her by playwright Mark Medoff. Her talent has also been showcased on television, most recently in the Emmy Award-winning Hallmark Hall of Fame production, Love is Never Silent.

When not working on theatrical projects, Frelich enjoys the quiet pace of home life and family. A versatile woman, she enjoys such activities as writing, sewing, baking, and crafts. Frelich often doesn't have time for all the things she loves doing, but recognizes the unique opportunities she's had for professional and personal development.

Frelich most recently starred as Marietta Terby in a new Mark Medoff play, The Hands of Its Enemy, at the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York. True to form, Hands received rave reviews -- another testimony to the power of Phyllis Frelich's artistry.

COURTESY OF NTD

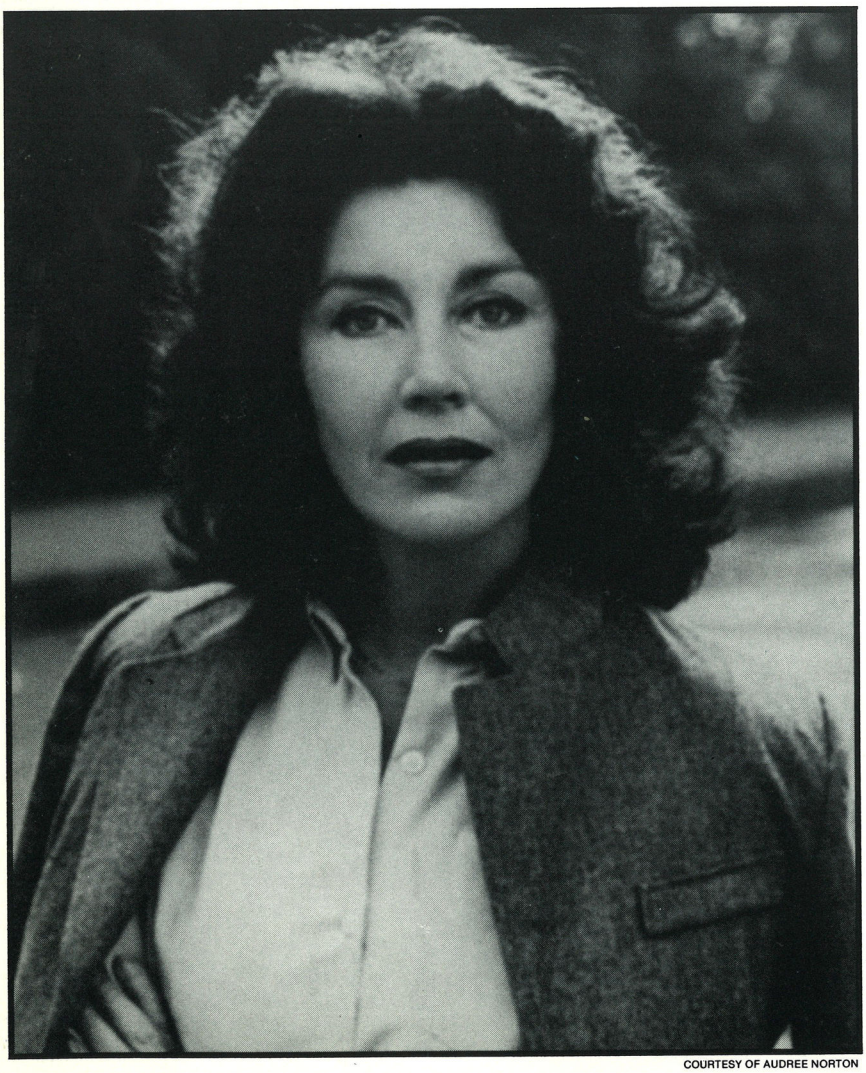
COURTESY OF PHYLLIS FRELICH

AUDREE NORTON

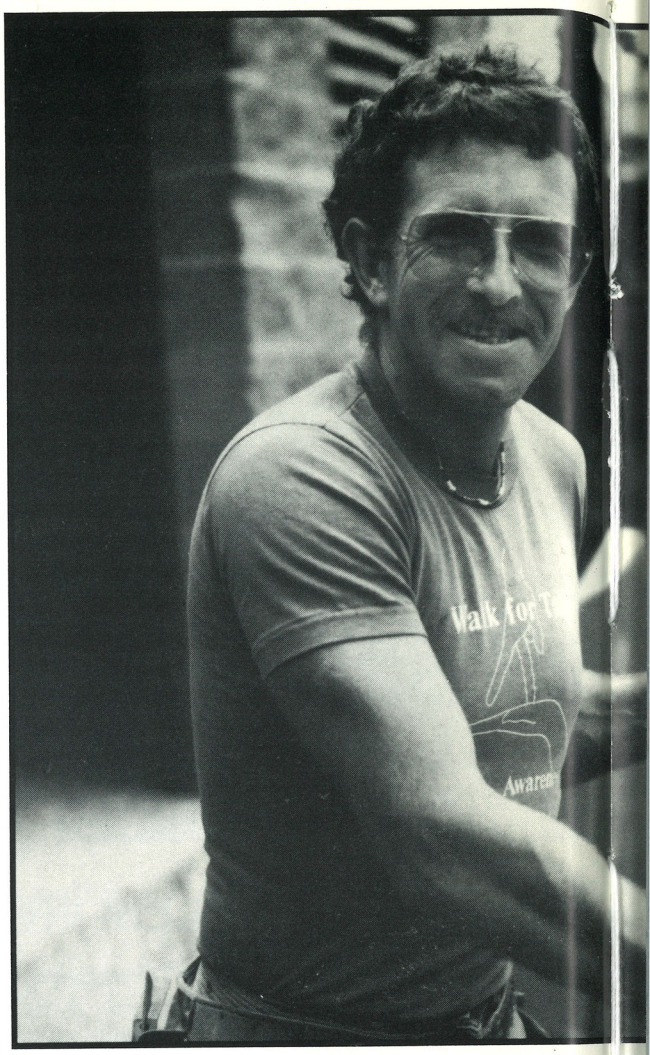
Audree Norton is a vivacious person with a deep zest for life. A native of Great Falls, Montana, she attended the Minnesota School for the Deaf and received a Bachelor of Arts from Gallaudet; she also has a graduate degree in Rhetoric and Public Address from the University of California. She spent two years with the NTD; on television she has done commercials for Pepsi Cola, Dr. Pepper, Cadillac, Ford, and others. Her plays have included Tartuffe, Our Town, and Little Women. Norton also worked with Bernard Bragg as half of a popular song-and-dance team.

Norton indicates that the NTD "helped to increase my experience as an actress and through such theatre it broadened my horizon of the world. . . . I met many interesting people and was exposed to many historical places such as Paris, London, and Rome." Upon leaving NTD she did more television work -- "segments and commercials, was doing fine until [others] protested having deaf actress doing the roles....By now I'm overjoyed with more theatrical and film opportunities bestowed on deaf actresses and actors. I continue taking acting classes and have done some directing. -- And the future? I would like to do repertory theatre and film work. I'm curious to see what will happen."

COURTESY OF NTD



COURTESY OF AUDREE NORTON



A. TIM SCANLON

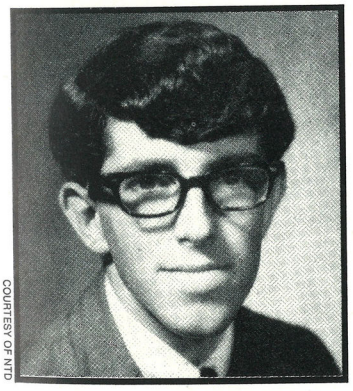
Along with Phyllis Frelich, Tim Scanlon was perform at Gallaudet College in 1967 when David Hays spot him and asked him to join the NTD. Scanlon agreed, a spent several intermittent years with NTD before de cid to move on to a childhood interest -- carpentry. He i n working in Washington, D.C. as a houseparent t Model Secondary School for the Deaf.

Scanlon indicates that carpentry, like theatre, re qui a good sense of the visual and the ability to coor lin eyes and hands to the work. He says that workin v wood is a pleasure for him because the smells o re the texture of grain and the designs coming toget experience. And he is good at what he does -- he h scale model of a Victorian dollhouse that would be th eventually hopes to become a contractor and own h s

His television credits include appearances on Se Neighborhood. With the NTD he did the CBS specia A gave superlative performances in Gilgamesh and Ey ur

On a philosophical level, Tim is grateful to NTD fo world at large, but acknowledges that he left after igl doesn't mince words. "It takes a lot patience to wo rk and perform. Even when curtain open, often still no t s character constantly. A lot hard work. Easy to burn out get [to] use more of my skills on this work, but glad I ex become what I am."

PHOTO BY ED DIPPMAN



COURTESY OF NTD

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ut glad I experience NTD theatre; it help me

MARY BETH MILLER

Mary Beth Miller's claim to fame predates her stint with NTD. A native of Louisville, Kentucky, she has always been active in theatre and did a lot of backstage work in makeup, grips, lighting, and stage management. One of her favorite early roles was Mrs. Chauvenent in the play Harvey. Miller had a job working at the Alabama School for the Deaf when she was asked to join the NTD after she attended the first professional summer school at the O'Neill Center in 1967. She subsequently spent seven very fruitful years with the company.

Miller received one Master's degree in Educational Theatre, another in Education of the Deaf, from Connecticut College and specializes in teaching sign language. She freelanced at New York University for nine months before being offered a permanent job there, and taught at the New York University Deafness Research and Training Center for seven years before the federal government cut off its support. She is now Director of Educational Programs at the New York Society for the Deaf.

She is blunt in describing the value of having traveled with the NTD. "My experience as [an] NTD member has helped me see how lucky I am to be living in America. Deaf people in the world are not as fortunate as Deaf Americans are and NTD has helped me explore the unlimited abilities I [have]. I used to feel I [had] limitations; NTD has helped me not to feel afraid to explore and to continue [growing] as an artist." Her explorations have led in many directions, most recently as a sign language consultant for the movie Children of a Lesser God where she taught sign language to William Hurt for his role as James Leeds. She still gives solo performances throughout the United States and enjoys developing creative sign language materials for theatre pieces and children's books. She has already published one book on sign language for children and will shortly be publishing another, Handtalk: Birthday. She hopes to do more books for children and "develop videotapes [about] famous deaf people for future generations to study and watch and to keep the beautiful tradition of ASL".

COURTESY OF NTD

COURTESY OF NTD

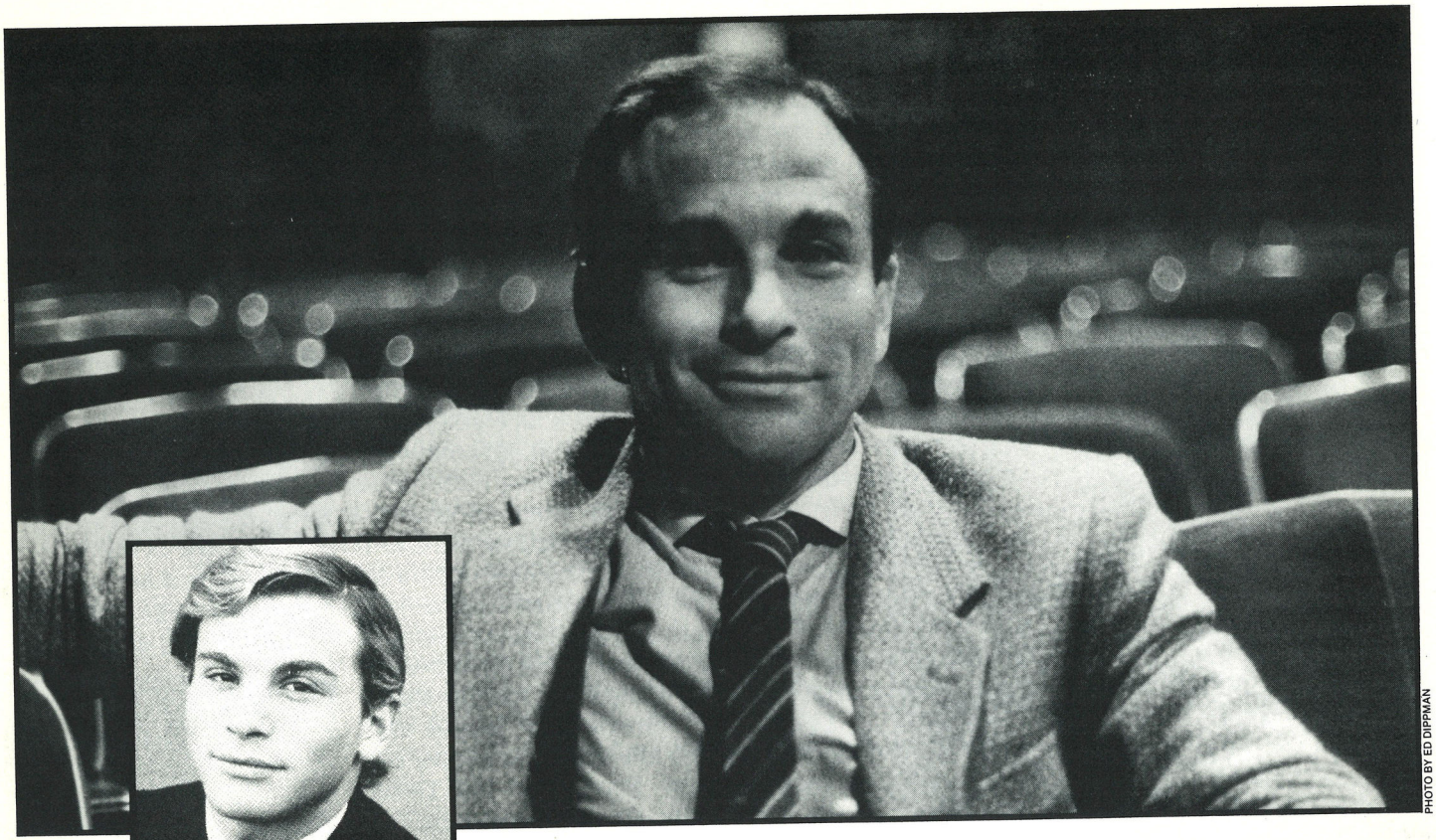


PHOTO BY ED DIPPMAN

COURTESY OF NTD

WILLIAM RHYS

William Rhys has the distinction of being one of three hearing actors to perform with the NTD in its founding year. He was working on a Master of Fine Arts in Acting at Brandeis University when he became involved with the NTD through an invitation by David Hays to teach acrobatics and tumbling at NTD's 1967 summer school. His interest in deaf culture piqued, he learned sign language and auditioned for a spot with the NTD, and won it. He gave up graduate school to be with the company full time and has never regretted it. Rhys stayed with the NTD for four years before leaving to pursue his career as an actor and director elsewhere.

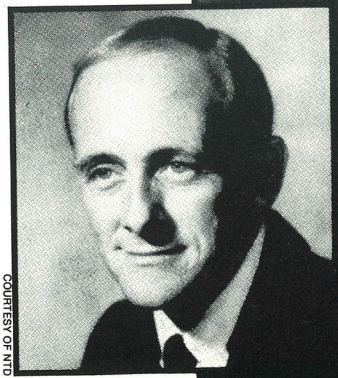
Like Phyllis Frelich, William Rhys enjoys home life, especially with a new baby in the house. He says that domestic life is in many ways just as challenging as the life of the theatre. People must work long hours, juggle several schedules, and develop creative solutions to problems under intense pressure, but he wouldn't trade it for anything else.

Rhys nonetheless remains active in theatre, primarily as a director. Associated with the Cleveland Playhouse since 1978, he is currently its Artistic Director. He also has maintained a periodic connection with the NTD, most recently directing the popular Farewell My Lovely during its 1985-86 season.

LOU FANT

Gossip does not usually bode well for most people, but it was a rumor about a new theatrical company of the deaf that led to Lou Fant's job as a founding member of the NTD. This hearing actor performed with the NTD for three years before moving out to California to pursue his acting career there.

Fant is clearly appreciative of his time with the NTD, stating that it was "an invaluable experience for my development as an actor and as a student of human culture." He has served as narrator for many plays presented by deaf actors throughout the United States and acted in such classics as Blithe Spirit, Stalag 17, and Morning's at Seven. His most recent role was as a priest in the Hallmark Hall of Fame production, Love Is Never Silent.



COURTESY OF NTD

Lou Fant remains involved with theatre, though he observes realistically that "85% of all actors on a given day are unemployed." The child of deaf parents, Fant is considered a national authority on American Sign Language. To pass the time and add a bit of spice to life, he teaches ASL at the Americana Theatre Arts in North Hollywood. He also free-lances as an interpreter and co-hosts a talk show with Herb Larson called Off Hand, aired locally in Hollywood.

PHOTO BY ED DIPPMAN

CHARLES COREY

Charles Corey joined the NTD "by surprise". He was involved with the O'Neill summer theatre school when David Hays invited him to join the company. Ready to say "no" due to job and family commitments, he shocked himself by saying "yes" when he realized the unique opportunity it represented. He spent three years with the company and is the father of the only "second generation" member of NTD, Rita Corey.

After leaving the NTD, Corey co-founded the Musign Theatre. He currently works for the Oakland Tribune as the head of the Insert Machine Department. His talent for machines has led to designing model planes, an activity for which he has won a measure of fame. He was selected as one of three people out of 2,000 to restore one of two existing World War I French planes -- the SPAD; the Smithsonian Museum has possession of the only flyable version in the world.

Charles Corey has fond memories of the NTD. He says, "It was not until I joined NTD and talked to people from Russia, Yugoslavia, and all over the world, that I appreciated the specialness of America. I never took it for granted after that."

For Charles Corey, the future looks bright. He is making plans to build a 3/4 scale replica of a one-man plane, the German Albatross. It will be fully flyable and he hopes to sell it to a connoisseur. He is a active man and has no intention of slowing down -- not even at the "respectable old age" of 65.

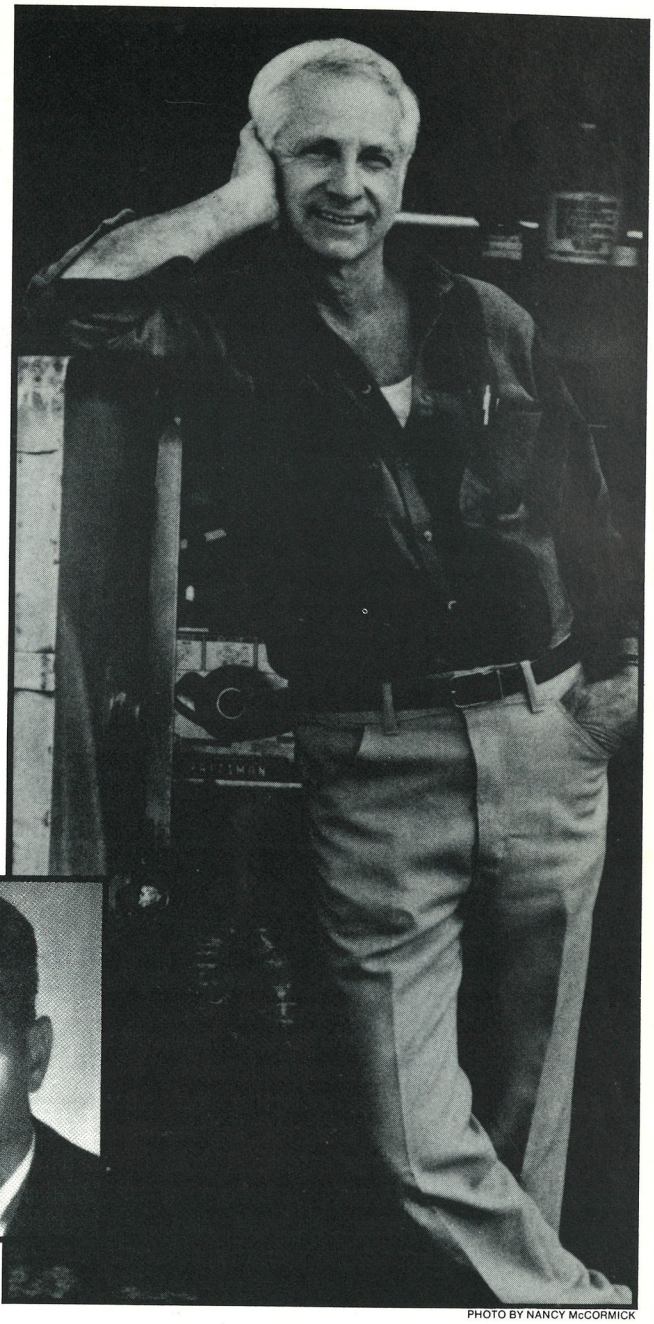
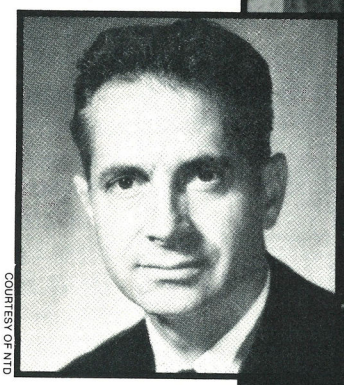
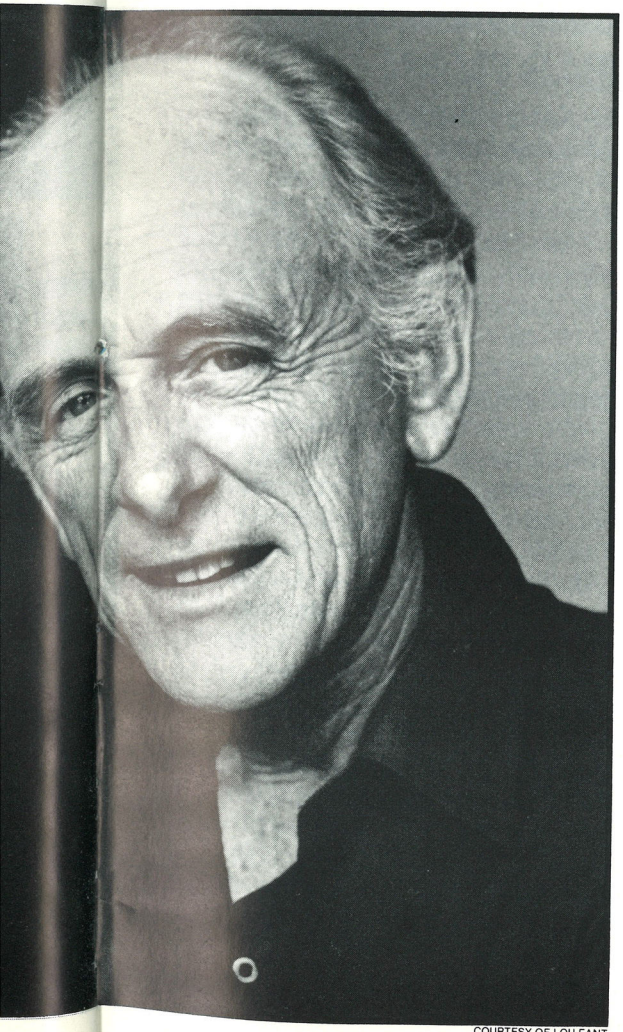


PHOTO BY NANCY McCORMICK



COURTESY OF NTD



COURTESY OF LOU FANT

"An invaluable experience for my development as an actor and as a student of human culture."

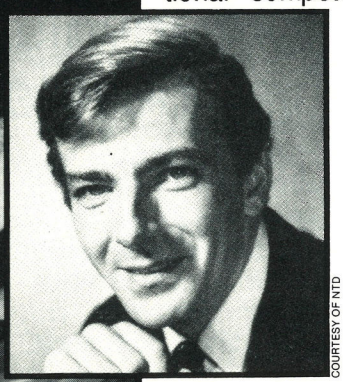
LOU FANT

"We are out to entertain, inspire, astonish both hearing and deaf audiences all over the world. It's not so much we want to show what we deaf people can do as we show what we do best."

BERNARD BRAGG

PHOTO BY JENNIFER BAKER

PHOTO BY JENNIFER BAKER



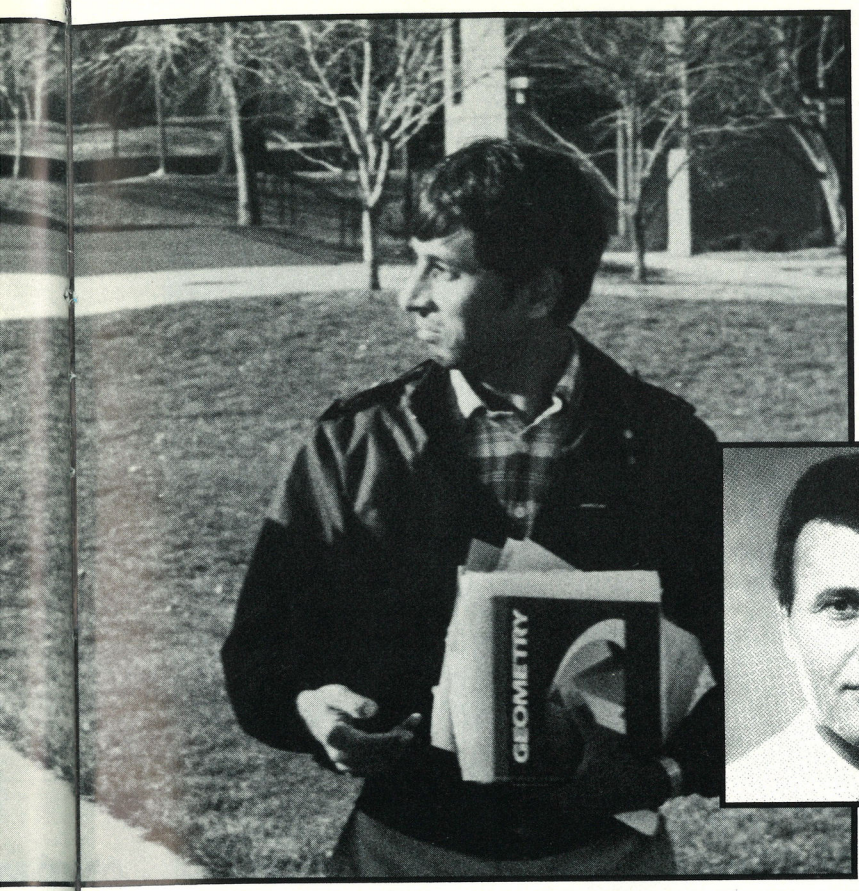
COURTESY OF NTD

GILBERT EASTMAN

Gilbert Eastman is an actor, director, and playwright — the consummate performing artist. Born in Middletown, Connecticut, he was educated at the American School for the Deaf and Gallaudet before receiving a M.F.A. at Catholic University. Since that time he has kept himself busy by acting in shows like Charley's Aunt, Flower Drum Song, and Gloria Mundi. Eastman also has been a director and stage manager for many classical and modern plays, including School for Wives, Romeo and Juliet, and The Threepenny Opera.

Currently a professor at Gallaudet's Theatre Department, Eastman headed it for 15 years. He has directed several productions, including an exceptional version of Antigone which was selected to compete in the American College Theatre Festival and went on to national competition at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. Eastman is also host of the monthly Gallaudet television program Deaf Mosaic, which received 2 Emmy Awards in 1986.

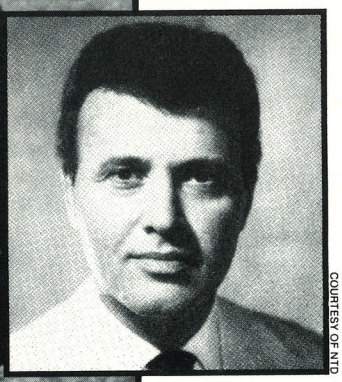
Eastman's literary efforts include Hands, Laurent Clerc: A Profile, and the groundbreaking Sign Me Alice--possibly the first play about the deaf written by a deaf person. His most recent accomplishment has been a course in Visual Gesture Communication; he also lectures nationally and internationally on that subject. A concurrent book will soon be published.



BERNARD BRAGG

Bernard Bragg was the very first professional deaf actor, a distinction he attained long before he co-founded the NTD. He began as a mime before live audiences here and abroad; one such performance in San Francisco led to an invitation by famed mime Marcel Marceau to study with him in Paris. Soon he had his own weekly television show, The Quiet Man. A true pioneer, Bragg made television history in 1980 by serving as Technical Advisor for the CBS-TV film production And Your Name is Jonah.

Bragg spent ten years with the NTD, adding considerable talent to its repertoire of performances. His best known role with the company was as Gianni Schicchi, which he says "involved a lot of movement, mime, and stylized signing. I loved it!" He is said to be the first 20th-century American to perform on a Russian stage.


COURTESY OF NTD

Currently Artist in Residence at Gallaudet University, Bragg gives workshops and lectures on theatre arts and sign communication and its place in education and the theatre. Every summer he works with gifted deaf teenagers at Boys Town, Nebraska, and with deaf students at the NTD summer school. And he still does one-man shows. A biography, Signs of Silence, has been published; Bragg is now working on Wonders of a Soundless World, a collection of stories about his own experiences with people all over the world.

JUNE RUSSI

June Eastman (Russi) is married to founding member Gil Eastman and has two daughters, Allison and Ingrid. She hails from Hartford, Connecticut, and attended the American School for The Deaf and majored in Child Supervision at Gallaudet College. It was during her marriage that she became one of the original eight people selected to travel and perform with the newly established NTD. She is, in her own words, "an old-fashioned person"; after spending two years with the company, she left when her oldest daughter entered kindergarten so that she could devote most of her time to raising her family. The Eastmans insist that this doesn't indicate disdain for equal rights, just their belief that their daughters should have a full-time parent at home. They have always shared responsibilities and she says that the most important quality for them has been communication.

Her favorite roles include Tracy Lord in The Philadelphia Story and Mei Li in Flower Drum Song. She still does occasional acting and most recently was a guest in a production of The Elephant Man; for the past four years she has been working as a secretary at Gallaudet's University Center. An active supporter of deaf culture, June was invited with her husband last year to travel to France and participate in the celebration commemorating the 200th anniversary of Laurent Clercs' birthday.

COURTESY OF NTD

PHOTO BY JENNIFER BAKER

COURTESY OF JOYCE LASKO

JOYCE LASKO

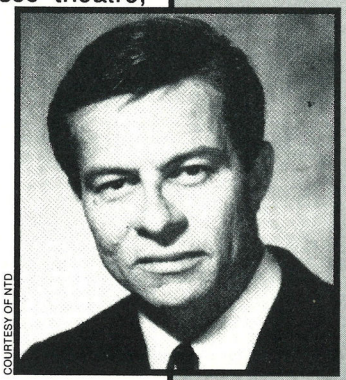
The NTD has been an integrated company from the beginning, and Joyce Lasko (Flynn), one of the original members, was its first hearing actress. Her involvement with NTD began because of her prior work with the annual Playwrights Conference at the O'Neill Center in Connecticut. She spent one year with NTD, then left to explore other opportunities in the performing arts. Lasko studied under the famed Lee Strasberg, and her work includes off-Broadway performances in Antigone, Charley's Aunt, and The Devil's Disciple. She has also performed on television in Camera Three, Search for Tomorrow, and The Secret Storm.

Joyce Lasko is currently a psychotherapist in New York City with a Master's degree in Social Work. Her specialization is in family therapy and she has done post-graduate training in that field. She is married to Gene Lasko, who currently teaches at the NTD. Her interests include skiing, music, and gardening. Like most former NTD members, she feels inspired by her experience there and although she is no longer directly affiliated with the deaf community, Lasko feels that her stay with the NTD greatly enhanced her knowledge of the nuances of body movement and language, as well as communication in general -- both invaluable qualities in her current profession.

COURTESY OF NTD

JOE VELEZ

Joe Velez died of cancer in 1974, leaving a wife, Bonnie, and two children, Michael David and Brenda Jean. Originally from California, he attended the California School for the Deaf and Gallaudet College. He worked as a printer for the San Francisco Chronicle and Examiner for 11 years, and was active in San Francisco theatre, performing in such plays as One Mad Night, Squaring It with the Boss, The Monkey's Paw and Moments Preserved. His outstanding performance in Jabberwocky was his particular favorite. Among his avocations were oil painting, basketball, and water skiing. He is much missed.



COURTESY OF NTD

COURTESY OF BONNIE CASWELL

We were unable to reach these founding members. If anyone knows where they may be contacted, please write to Deaf Life c/o MSM Productions at Box 63083, Marketplace Mall, Rochester, New York 14623-6383.

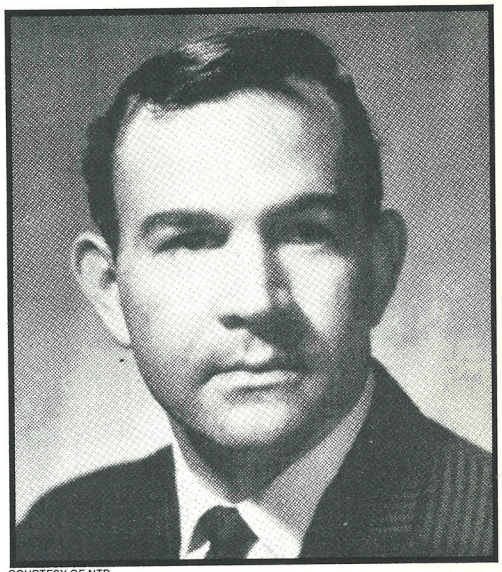
The information below was thoughtfully provided by the Public Relations Department of the National Theatre of the Deaf, and taken from the Playbill of its 1967 Season.

COURTESY OF NTD

Violet Armstrong

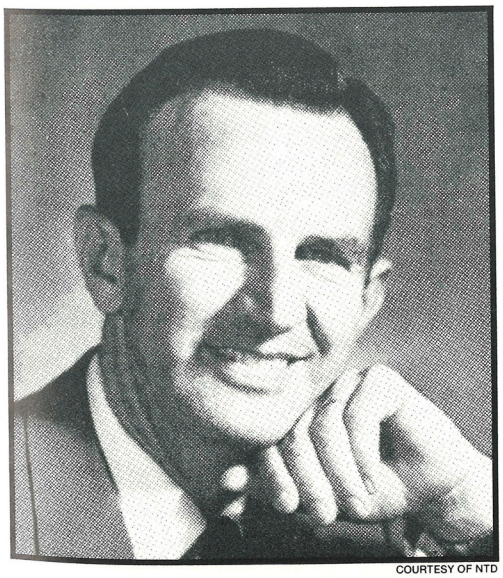
Violet Armstrong's roots are in Brooklyn, New York. She studied at the New York School for the Deaf and also at Gallaudet University. She has been an office worker and an auditor, in addition to following her theatrical pursuits. She had the role of Carmen in the Gallaudet Alumni Show in New York, and was in a deaf production of Lady Windemere's Fan in New York City. Her work with the NTD includes roles in Gianni Schicchi and Saroyan's The Man With His Heart in the Highlands.

Howard Palmer



COURTESY OF NTD

Howard Palmer began his education at the Missouri School for the Deaf, got his B.A. at Gallaudet, and did graduate work at Mississippi College. As a teacher of science and driver education, Dean of Boys, and Drama Coach, he worked at the Arkansas School for the Deaf and at the Mississippi School for the Deaf. He has also been a guidance counselor for mentally retarded children for the Mississippi Mental Health Asssociation. His theatrical credits include roles in Dial 'M' for Murder, The Robe, Oedipus, Hamlet, and Othello. He also directed The Robe and Marriage Proposal.



COURTESY OF NTD

Ralph White

Ralph White attended school at the Georgia School for the Deaf and recieved his B.A. from Gallaudet University. He went on to get two M.A.'s, one at the University of Texas and one in Secondary School Administration and Supervison with a Leadership Training Program in the Area of the Deaf at San Fernando Valley State. He taught social studies at the Georgia School for the Deaf and was a teacher at the Texas School for the Deaf for 15 years. With many academic acting credits, he was also Director and Drama Coach at both schools.

COURTESY OF BONNIE CASWELL

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Joseph Sarpy
Kenneth Swiger
Rico Peterson
Timothy Near
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Sir Michael Redgrave
Joseph Castronovo
Bob Blumenfeld
John McRae

Gunilla Wagstrom
(Swedish Theatre of the Deaf)
Michael Slipchenko
(Theatre of Mimicry and Gesture, Moscow)
Paul Johnson
Jessica Hull
Betty Bonni
Peggy Schoditsch
Raymond Fleming
Charles Jones
Ray Parks
Sharon Wood
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(Interim Theatre, London)
Jody Steiner
Mark Kindschi
Jurgen Kuhn
Charles Baird
Adrian Blue
Mike Lamitola
Howie Seago
Akihiro Yonaiyama
(Japan Theatre of the Deaf)
Izaki Tetsuya
(Japan Theatre of the Deaf)
Mitsutaka Tachikawa
Susan Jackson

William Seago
Lizette Smith
Bari K. Willerford
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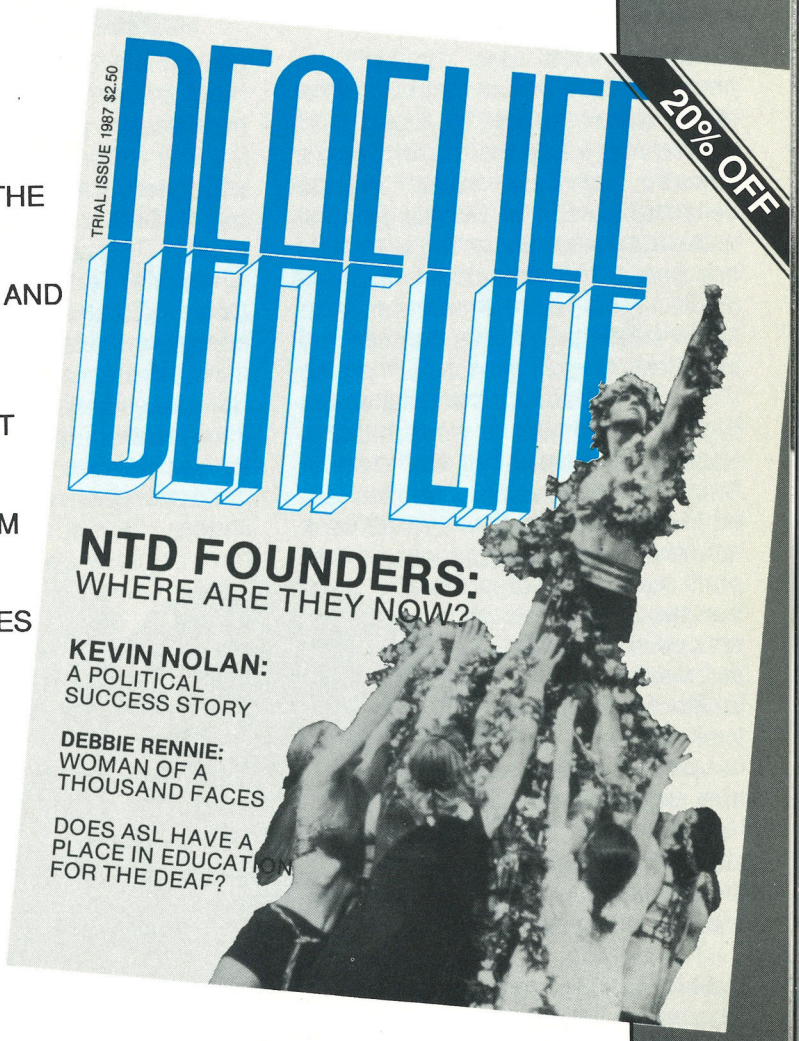

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DEBBIE
Woman of

What does one do in the presence of a "treasure box full of vibes, full of energy"? Open it of course and enjoy the show! Such a treasure can be found in the delightful person of Debbie Rennie: animated performing artist, storyteller and poet -- the proverbial jack-of-all-trades. This is the woman who captured the prestigious Grand Prize for "Best Overall Performer" of the World Federation of the Deaf at the Eighth Annual International Pantomime Festival of the Deaf in Brno, Czechoslovakia. She also is a professional clown who travels as a member of Young Audiences, a non-profit educational organization that sponsors artists-in-residence for schools across America. To Rochester, New York residents, her performances as a regular on the Visual Poetry/ storytelling scene are a welcome feast for the eyes.

Talking with Debbie Rennie, it is easy to see why this talented person is a success. She has a far-ranging, intense love for life in all its multifaceted forms. Her deep belief in the dignity of people and willingness to open herself to others cannot help but charm the hardest of hearts. This trait is particularly evident when Ms. Rennie performs as the clown Zalami or engages an enraptured audience of children with a round of her magical storytelling. She is especially fond of children and has made it a focus of her work to include a large number of performances with them. She states, "I respect children. They have unique way seeing world. Often they teach me much. Many adult don't respect children. See children like too small, therefore don't exist . I want change attitudes, teach people about value of differences between each other."

True to form, Debbie does not emphasize her deafness except to demonstrate that it opens up a new world for her, equally as bright and wondrous as any hearing or "non-handicapped" view of the world. She gently reminds us that "a lot of people overlook that hearing person have handicap." To illustrate, Debbie gives us the story of the hearing woman who approached her after a performance as Zalami and said, "I don't know how you can travel alone and do these marvelous performances. I can't do that -- it would scare me to death!" Debbie stresses her desire to be "thought of as human first, not woman, not deaf, but all together. I'm glad I'm deaf.

ERENNIE:
f Thousand Faces

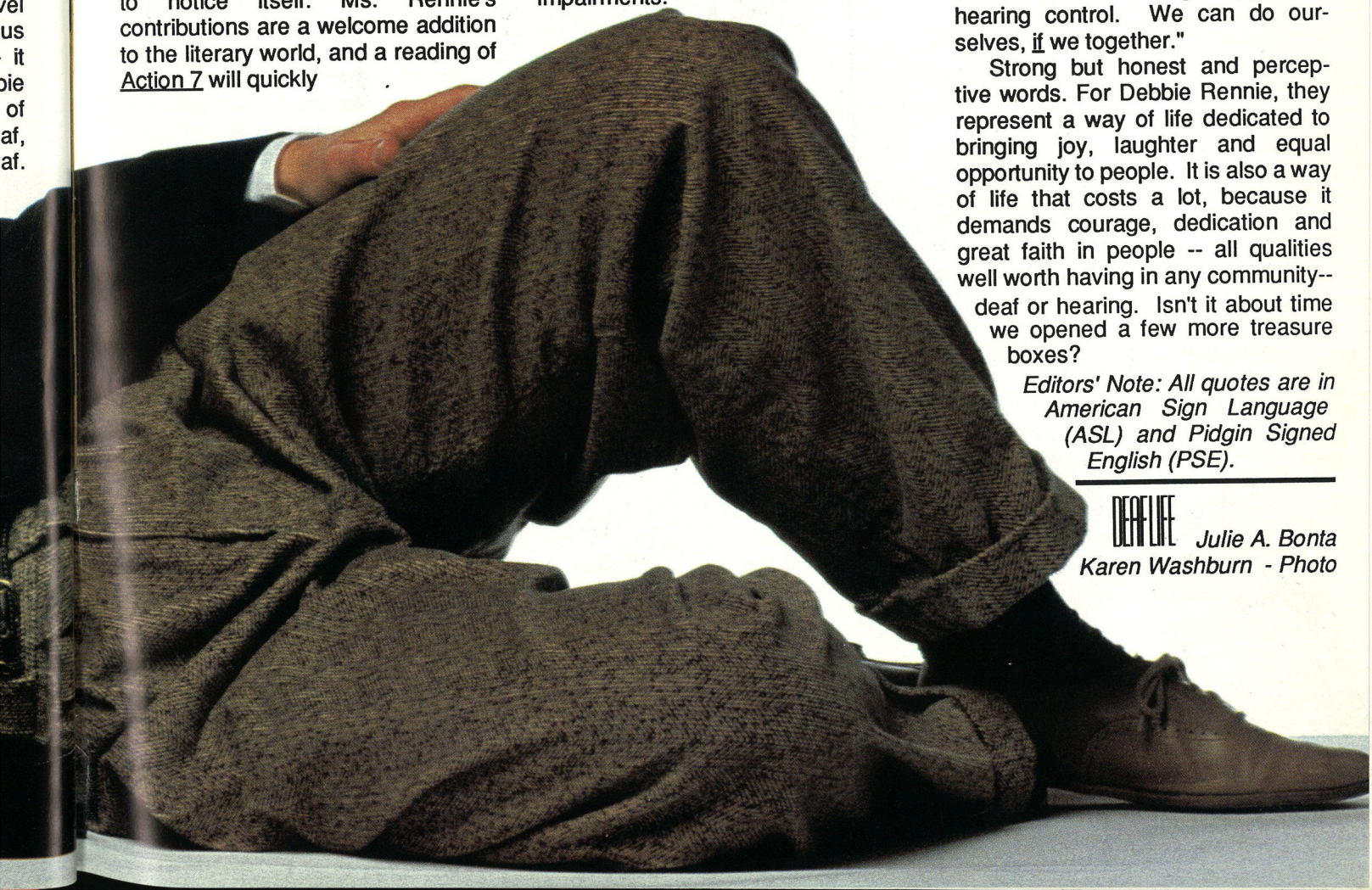
Why? I feel special and all people special in their own way."

Debbie Rennie is also a poet, and recently had some of her poetry published in Action 7 , a Rochester, N.Y. magazine published by the 21st Sensual Press; Jim Cohn, publisher (reviewed elsewhere in this issue). All of the poetry in Action 7 is in American Sign Language (ASL). It represents a pioneering effort of the highest kind -- an attempt to give free voice to a cultural minority long silent; not by choice, but through the ignorance of a world moving too fast to notice itself. Ms. Rennie's contributions are a welcome addition to the literary world, and a reading of Action 7 will quickly confirm the range of her poetic talent. This is not, as Debbie would say, "a collection of flower poems", but a legitimate, well done literary effort by three deaf performing artists, all with considerable skill and talent.

The success of any community directly depends on the continued, quality involvement of its members. Deaf communities are no exception. Historically, deaf and hearing-impaired members of society have had little sense of community, partly due to the isolating nature of hearing impairments. Today, many such communities are coming together but have suffered from a lack of broad leadership and consistent involvement by a majority of its members. Debbie Rennie cogently points out the importance of "deaf community to support other deaf -- with time and/or money too. I know sometime money is problem, too much to afford, but other kinds support also very important. Deaf community weak politically. If we want continue have interpreters, TTY and other service, we must work together or we will fall apart. Too much deaf communities let thing happen by hearing control. We can do ourselves, if we together."

Strong but honest and perceptive words. For Debbie Rennie, they represent a way of life dedicated to bringing joy, laughter and equal opportunity to people. It is also a way of life that costs a lot, because it demands courage, dedication and great faith in people -- all qualities well worth having in any community-- deaf or hearing. Isn't it about time we opened a few more treasure boxes?

Editors' Note: All quotes are in American Sign Language (ASL) and Pidgin Signed English (PSE).



DEAF LIFE *Julie A. Bonta*
Karen Washburn - Photo

GYMNASTIC MARVEL

She swings gracefully from the lower bar and catches the upper bar with ease and confidence. She swings upward and around, then flies into the air in a somersault and lands on the mat, feet first, legs spread, body poised and head held high triumphantly. At thirteen and deaf since birth, Kelly Schemenauer is a marvel at gymnastics.

At 4'8", Kelly stands "tall" in her gymnastic circle. She started climbing trees before she learned to walk. At four, she was put into a gymnastics class upon her grandmother's advice, but was withdrawn by her coach's request because she never paid any attention to her classes and instructors. By the age of six, she was back again and this time her attention was totally on gymnastics.

After finishing her daily classes like every other youngster at the Michigan School for the Deaf (MSD), Kelly practices her gymnastics from five to eight-thirty, four nights a week. Her summer hours are from three in the afternoon to six-thirty, with Saturdays included if necessary. Kelly practices on the bars, balance beam, horse vault and does floor exercises. Kelly's specialty is the uneven bars. She has no fears in trying new routines and would try anything on these bars as long as she is into gymnastics. Her least-liked exercise is the balance beam. She has trouble on the beam due to bad balance. Her deafness may be a reason for improper balance on the beam. But she is very stubborn and

continues to practice on the beam a great deal. She has hopes to overcome the balance difficulty some day.

Kelly takes lessons under the class 2-optional division. In this division she practices four times weekly. She does regular exercises at the beginning of each lesson, then lines up with the other gymnasts and practices on the uneven bars, balance beam, floor exercise and horse vault. Each gymnast practices on one exercise until it is performed almost perfectly before moving on to the next exercise. Kelly practices a great deal on the uneven bars, floor exercise and balance beam. The beam is the toughest one for her, whereas she does so well on the vault that she practices it less.

Kelly has not entered any Olympic games yet, but she has already gathered various ribbons for her performances on the bars, floor exercise and vault. To her name she has won thirty ribbons, eight medals for second and third place finishes, and two trophies, both for first place on the vault. All of these were won in different events held in her hometown in Michigan. Together with her hard-of-hearing teammates, Jennifer Jenkin, age eleven, and Rachel Harris, age twelve, she and these two young deaf ladies are our future hopefuls for the hearing Olympics.

Blonde-haired and wearing braces on her teeth, Kelly has a gentle smile and bright green eyes. She is energetic and it is hard to see her resisting the lure of the bars and balance beams surrounding her. When DEAF LIFE asked her parents about the news of their daughter's gymnastic ability, they replied, "We are very supportive and always attended all her meets in the past and always will in the future. We are sure Kelly will succeed in the future and it is possible that she will try out for the hearing Olympics." Kelly says with a twinkle in her eyes, "They are very encouraging even though it is very expensive to pay for lessons."

Her family's support has even included selling raffle tickets so Kelly could go on a team trip to Russia. Her trip brought her a better understanding of the Russian gymnastic world. DEAF LIFE asked her what she discovered in Russia, and Kelly commented, "The Russians are more strict than in the United States. We had to practice almost five hours every day! Their exercises on the floor are rough and if after awhile you are hurting, they won't let you stop. Most of our gymnasts cried because of the pain caused by over-exercise. The Russian coaches just told us to stop crying like babies and continue exercising." She said that the coaches there made them come back for more exercise after each meal. She was so often tired and aching from the exercises that the next morning her performance on the bars was often poor because she was too exhausted. When asked in which country she preferred to continue her gymnastic training, Kelly responded, "I would prefer the United States because they are much more flexible and give me enough time to rest and warm up for more practice the next day."

Like most of us, Kelly has dreams of her future. She says she would like to go to college and become a coach for other deaf gymnasts. Her goal is to make it into the hearing olympics and succeed. Kelly is very hopeful and shows promise for a terrific gymnastic career. Although she continues to struggle with the balance beam, she has all that is needed to suceed: skill, motivation and the drive to make it through. Her advice to other deaf athletes is to "be more active, exercise. Don't sit back and become lazy. Keep moving all the time and get involved in activities." Asked what she would like to say to other deaf athletes. Kelly comments "Deaf children should not be denied any sport because of their deafness." So for all you athletes out there, don't turn down your athletic interest. Go out there with Kelly and prove your worth!

DEAF LIFE *Wilma Rose Santiago*
Ed Dippman - Photo

DOES ASL HAVE A PLACE IN EDUCATION FOR THE DEAF?

ASL has been used in the underground for both educational and social purposes. Is it time to bring it into the open?

While waiting for a downtown bus to arrive, a group of deaf people converse among themselves. Their hands make motions in the air and their facial expressions add color to their moving hands. Fingers form alphabetical letters as words are spelled out here and there and their bodies move ever so smoothly to the story that unfolds. These are young deaf people speaking in a unique language - American Sign Language (ASL).

What is ASL ? It is the native language of thousands of deaf people and is the primary language used by most deaf adults among themselves. Linguist Ted Supalla describes ASL as a language that is different from English. "It is a true language with consistent rules of grammar, syntax, and word structure. These are what linguists would look at in any communication system." Nearly 500,000 deaf people and an unknown number of hearing people use ASL regularly, making it the third most widely used non-English language in the United States, following Spanish with 4.5 million people and Italian with 600,000 people.

Supalla, who learned to sign in infancy from his deaf family, remembers "finding out that ASL was bad" when he first entered deaf school in 1956. Even the deaf teachers at school "looked down on me whenever I used ASL. They wanted me to use proper signing." These days, that means using signs in English word order. Educators have encouraged the use of invented sign systems, commonly called signed English, in schools as a way of making English visually accessible to deaf students. These systems use ASL signs, as well as signs that have been initialized using the first letter of the English word they represent, and some signs unique to the systems.

Supalla was shocked to discover that advocates of signed English thought that their signing was better than his. "They only took a few classes while I signed all my life and they tell me my signing is no good."

There's a growing controversy on how people view ASL in the educational process for deaf children. To give us a better understanding of the issues, DEAF LIFE interviewed professionals involved in educating deaf people.

Victoria (Torrie) Armour, who is hearing, has been teaching deaf students for several years. Currently a Sign Communication Specialist at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, New York, she has developed courses for deaf college students who communicate primarily in sign, and who have difficulty with written English. Her work grew out of observations of young deaf children who would "act out" what they

wanted to communicate, or who would sign in ASL, but not know how to say it in English. "It is important to be able to understand the language a child is acting out in order to feed back to the child the appropriate English response he or she needs." Armour feels that flexibility in teaching English is important, and in practice this flexibility can include using ASL to teach English.

George Attleweed is a counselor/advisor for the Ohlone College Hearing Impaired program in Fremont, California, and also served as interim director for the Gallaudet College Regional Center. He has been active in the development of the systems for signing English that are used in schools today. Attleweed believes that English should be taught through "total immersion". Recent workshops on teaching English through ASL, he believes, are misleading. "I have gone to workshops featuring the "carrot" that ASL would be used to teach English. That is a mistake. [They are] two entirely different languages. We teach Spanish by Spanish only. Total immersion."

If you give a hungry person a fish, that person has food for one day. If you teach that person how to fish, that person will have food for a lifetime. He believes that there is a danger that too much ASL will lock a student into a non-English pattern. The student will understand the teacher, but won't be able to understand English. "It's all right to use ASL to teach concepts", he says; "no argument there." Then those concepts need to be translated back to English through the use of one of the invented systems of signed English.

Edward Scouten, noted educator, historian, and author of *Turning Points in the Education of Deaf People,* feels that it is the teacher's responsibility for the student's acquisition of English, which is the one key to learning almost all other subjects. "Without English, there is little education really possible for prelingually deaf children." Scouten believes that ASL has no place in education because it would negatively influence the educational process. It would steal time away from learning and practicing English. Rather, he states that a prelingually deaf child should first have twelve to fourteen years of English as a foundation. After such time it would be all right for the prelingually deaf youth to learn and use ASL.

"If you had asked me ten years ago," chuckled Dennis Berrigan, "I would have told you that English is important, and therefore you must sign in English. Not now." Berrigan is deaf, and a certified teacher of deaf children. He currently teaches ASL to hearing adults in the Sign Language Studies department at Madonna College in Livona, Michigan.

There is a danger that too much ASL will lock a student into a non-English pattern.

His experience as a teacher, along with research on ASL as a language, has convinced him that ASL can be used in the classroom for teaching English as a second language, as well as other subjects. "The concept comes first. How it applies to English can be taught second."

Berrigan's parents and siblings are also deaf. Growing up in a signing environment, and continuing to work in a signing environment, has led him to believe that English is used as "the language of oppression" of deaf people by hearing people. Deaf children, he believes, lose motivation to learn because they can't understand the teachers.

Terry Johnson underscores the need for teachers to understand ASL culture. Johnson feels that accepting ASL's culture is important in being able to have a "positive attitude towards ASL as a language itself." A coordinator for interpreting services at the Rochester Institute of Technology, Johnson states, "A person should be able to communicate to another in the appropriate language the other understands." Part of his job as an interpreter is to figure out what that "appropriate language" is. To do that, you have to know both cultures: hearing and deaf.

"Ninety-five percent of hearing teachers of the deaf don't get involved in the Deaf Community," Berrigan guesses. And the other five percent? "Well, they have to prove themselves first before they're accepted. If they actively seek involvement in the deaf community, people will eventually accept them and be willing to help them learn about deaf culture."

ASL can be used in the classroom for teaching English as a second language, as well as other subjects. "The concept comes first; how it applies to English can be taught second."

Johnson argued that "anyone who says that ASL doesn't belong in education really needs to go back to school! There should be more deaf teachers more qualified to teach the language of the deaf."

Shaking his head and frowning in response to the above comment, Scouten says "I would say that to master any language -- ASL, Spanish, French, etc. -- an individual must live with the language to be learned, twenty-four hours a day. It all depends on the English. No language can be learned without the reinforcement of constant usage -- practice." He argues that "ASL is a language of concept. However, a concept is nothing if it cannot be received through reading or expressed in writing or speech. This is a reality of the hearing world of work."

Most deaf children come to school knowing little, if any, sign from hearing families who do not sign ASL. It is natural for these families to want their children to understand English. If teachers were to use ASL, wouldn't that disadvantage these children? It's usually the children of deaf families who help the children from hearing families, observed Berrigan. This situation "pulls down" the ASL student, retarding that student's progress, Berrigan asserts. "No one really benefits in this situation."

Johnson and Armour both noted that hearing people learn about ASL from classes they take. They learn about the grammar and structure of sign. Deaf people use ASL, but are not taught about ASL in school.

The educational establishment does not recognize ASL as something worthwhile with which to educate deaf children. Supalla hunches that although there are probably some teachers who use ASL in classrooms, it is not part of official policy. He thinks that it is because nobody really understands how ASL works. People feel threatened by it.

Even if ASL is to find a place in education, it won't be an easy task to change the system. "Thousands of teachers are already tenured. We can't ask them to leave," says Supalla. "We have to start at graduate schools where future teachers are trained." An additional difficulty with the existing system is that there are not many materials for those teachers who do support the use of ASL in the classroom.

This is clearly a question that opens a Pandora's box of controversy. ASL has been used in the underground for both educational and social purposes. Is it time to bring it into the open? DEAF LIFE invites you to respond to this article by writing to the editor. We will publish your responses in a future issue.

DEAF LIFE

C. Tane Akamatsu
Wilma Rose Santiago

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